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Aboriginal Native climbing a Gum Tree Kalangadoo, April 1853

OLD TIME AUSTRALIAN LIFE

ISABELLA WATSON

'THE BURDEN OF EVE'S DAUGHTERS'
'BRAVE AMICE'



EDINBURGH
ANDREW ELLIOT, 17 PRINCES STREET
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ILLUSTRATIONS

ABORIGINAL NATIVE CLIMBING A GUM TREE Frontispiece

KALANGADOO, APRIL 1853

This method of climbing trees is wonderful, but descending still more so. Trees with 60 or 70 feet of trunk are negotiated by the natives entirely depending on little notches made in the bark as they ascend—only a few of the boldest men can do it. When the tree is of such a size in trunk as can be partly grasped round, or has some slope, it is easier. The natives from custom can use their feet nearly as readily as hands.

The man standing at foot of tree has his head covered with twigs of gum tree, which they commonly do in hot sun. It has a powerful and refreshing aromatic perfume.

CORROBOREE

Facing p. 50

KALANGADOO, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, 1853

When the full moon her glorious orb displays, Australia's wild men, joyous 'neath her rays, Smeared o'er with paint, in rude fantastic glee, Dance, shout, and sing their wild Corroboree!

PART I

THE CORROBOREE AND THE FINDING OF WILLY

CHAPTER I

"Well, good luck to you, McLean. I hope one of these two good ladies will be willing to come to us, but I have had no answer to either of the letters, and I fear an elderly person would find life here so very different from what she was accustomed to at home. I would not for the world have her come, and then be home-sick or lonely, but if one of them did try it, it would be very good for us, make us brush up and be more civilised, if a lady was in charge of the housekceping."

Mr Andrews, of Nangwarry Sheep Station, was seeing off his manager and a young neighbour of the name of Thompson, whose mother had a station about fifty miles away. They were going on a very exciting errand to Melbourne. Work for women being very hard to get, the matron of a large orphanage in England bethought herself of the idea of emigrating the girls to Australia as domestic helps for the many scattered stations all over the southern parts of that enormous country, where, in those days, the lives of the settlers' wives were one long unbroken stretch of toil and isolation from the companionship of their own sex; often the

nearest neighbour might live at anything from twenty to one hundred miles away; and though they made little of riding great distances to help each other in times of sickness and trouble, they all longed for the every-day help of a woman resident on the stations. A few managers had wives, but mostly the men were unmarried, and about on an average of fifteen to one in the population.

This matron's sister was nurse in charge of the Melbourne hospital, and, on receiving her sister's letter about the girls, she laid the matter before the authorities, who promised to give assisted passages, and make all necessary enquiries before settling the girls at the various stations, and notice to the owners was sent out when the first batch of sixty young women were expected at Melbourne.

All the ladies in great haste sent off their brothers, husbands, and sons, to try at any cost to get a girl, and Mr Andrews had written to see if one of the four matrons in charge of them would come to Nangwarry as housekeeper. He knew only two of them were emigrating, the others were officials of the school, and one lady, he had heard, had a son who was pretty sure to claim her.

Alas, for the eager station mothers! Only a very few got any helps at all, and those that did so, it was from the wives of the managers, horsekeepers and shepherds on their stations, for the inn, as soon as they landed, was besieged by crowds of well-to-do young fellows, entreating the girls to marry them, and the good rector and the registrar of Melbourne had the busiest time of their lives.

Mr Andrews waited patiently for long after the

message to send the buggy down to Melbourne for the housekeeper was over-due, and had with secret satisfaction come to the conclusion that the old lady was not coming, when he heard an arrival in the station yard, and saw a friend and neighbouring station owner, a Captain Pringle, dismounting.

"Hullo, Andrews! Please send off the buggy

at once for Mrs McLean."

"What!" cried the astonished Mr Andrews.

"Yes, for Mrs McLean. You see McLean could not get you a housekeeper. Brown very naturally claimed his mother to live with him; the other old dame funked it, and is off home again; but McLean has got himself a wife, and a real nice lass she is, of an old border yeoman family, not too young, about twenty-eight. It seems the matron of the school's nicce must needs come out here too, and this Miss Grey was her governess and came with her, and Thompson fell violently in love with the niece, and now—they are

Wooed and married an' a', an' a', Wooed and married an' a',"

sang the jolly sailor. "Rough on you, old fellow, about the housekeeper, though, I must say."

"Not at all! Not at all! I am perfectly delighted, Pringle. McLean is a capital fellow, and I am so glad he has got a nice little wife. And to tell you the honest truth, Pringle, I have been repenting having asked the lady to come ever since the letter went."

"And was waiting her arrival with yer heart in yer boots, man. Oh, Andrews, Andrews! Mrs Pringle will die of laughing when I tell her this tale of ye. But really, lad, ye have had a narrow escape, for if ever there was a cross old cat, it is her, or I am a Dutchman."

Mr Andrews went and despatched the buggy at once on its long journey of nearly two hundred miles to Melbourne, in charge of a trusty station hand; the man would reach an inn called Connel's Inn late that night, but there was a good moon, and get fresh horses next day, leaving his own there for the return journey. On horseback through the serub it was not nearly so far, but Mr Andrews did not know if the lady could ride.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN PRINGLE had commanded a large sailing vessel which made the six-month voyage twice a year between Australia and Liverpool, and on his final voyage the weather had been dreadfully stormy the whole way, and they had lost their reckoning and believed themselves to be many miles from land when the ship struck on a rock. Fortunately she was jammed between two, and when the storm and the tide went down together they found they were firmly fixed on the Australian shore, just above high water mark, and were able to save all the food and many other useful things in the course of the next few days, before a renewal of the storm battered the wreck to pieces. Several of his men having met with injuries, and all being very weary, Captain Pringle, who had a high character in the mercantile service for kindness and consideration to his crews, decided to rest for a week or so before starting on the hundred-mile march to where he believed Melbourne to be, and they all being quite ignorant of the Australian scrub, dared not leave the shore for fear of being bushed, the danger of which Captain Pringle was well aware of. So a long and difficult road lay before them.

A small stream flowed into the sea, close to where the ship had gone ashore. It came down a narrow rocky valley, and was a raging torrent at the time of the wreck, but in a few days it became quite a small series of pools, which the shipwrecked men hoped would last some weeks.

One day, a man dropped his bucket into a shallow pool, and rescued it with difficulty and full of sand and gravel. He emptied it on the side of the river, and was just going to wash it out, when he saw a yellow stone, and a second look told him he had found a small nugget of

gold.

The man ran shouting to Captain Pringle, who at once put the whole party on rations to make the flour, tea, baeon and other foods last as long as possible. Wallaby, kangaroo and oppossum were to be had for the shooting, and they were well off for guns and ammunition. They had also brought a number of spades and picks from the wreck, so were able to start digging and washing for gold at once; and, by the time they had got all the surface gold and the provisions were getting exhausted, each man had a niee little store of both dust and nuggets; for Captain Pringle had insisted on all sharing equally, including himself.

Having fed and befriended a wandering black and his Lubra and child, the native offered to guide them by a much shorter route through the scrub, and after marking out their claim, and sowing a quantity of home flower seeds, which, in after years, made the valley at certain seasons a scene of great beauty, they started for

Melbourne.

Here Captain Pringle got the necessary papers

made out to establish their claim, saw the agent of his shipping company, and sent in his resignation.

With their pockets full of money, the larger number of the happy-go-lucky sailors preferred to relinquish their claims, and Captain Pringle borrowed money from the shipping firm and bought them all, returning a few months after to the place with a competent mining expert, and plant for deep digging.

In the next two years of hard and incessant toil, he got enough gold, not only to pay off his debt, but was able to buy a small station about forty miles inland, where he started keeping pigs on a large scale; for to make a comfortable home for his wife and eight children was his great ambition, and a fortune was a very secondary concern to him. As soon as possible he wrote home to Mrs Pringle to come out, and she, being a good sailor and a thrifty soul, offered her services to the company as stewardess to save her passage money. They had a great respect for Captain Pringle and had been very sorry to lose him, and they at once agreed, and also gave the eight children their passage, without any charge whatever.

Mrs Pringle was a farmer's daughter, and had had much experience with pigs, and bacon and ham curing; and she and her husband were very successful, so between the small gold mine and the now great and growing station, Captain Pringle was a wealthy man in every way, for the family now were twelve in number, nine sons and three daughters. The two eldest sons were married.

He had been in Melbourne with them to receive two prize Berkshire pigs his eldest son had bought for him when at home, and leaving them to see after the pigs, he had ridden on another forty miles to take Mr Andrews the message, quite as a matter of course, in the Australian ideas of neighbourliness.

Mr Pringle stayed two days at Nangwarry at the urgent request of the "Judge," as all called Mr Andrews, who was chief magistrate of the district, and he gave authoritative opinions on "what a lady would like" to that entirely bachelor establishment.

The nice room prepared for the housekeeper was dismantled, and two large rooms were prepared in the main station for Mr and Mrs McLean. He had before lived in the bachelors' quarters with the station hands; and many more home-made chairs and other articles were manufactured. Penola, the nearest small township, about twenty-five miles away, was ransacked for stuff for curtains and covers for her sitting-room, and new, gay shirts for the men's own wear, the latter being at a premium owing to the run on them by the many suitors to the emigrant girls.

"I say, Judge, whatever made you want a housekeeper!" asked Mr Pringle, when his host and he were enjoying a quiet pipe after the heat and bustle of the day.

"Mrs Hammond's accident, Pringle. Just think where we would have been if Mrs Burns had not been able to come."

"You don't say Mrs Hammond has been hurt, Andrews? How? When?"

"Yes, indeed. Their buggy upset nine miles back on the Melbourne road, and she was carried in here with a broken thigh bone about six months ago. I had seen a thigh set, but never done it before, and you can imagine how I felt; but it had to be done, and there was no one to attend to her but poor Hammond, and he is such a rough chap. I sent a man galloping for all he was worth to Yomola, and I was so thankful when I saw Burns and his wife next morning. They rode down through the night, she with wee Annie in a basket in front of her saddle; and it was twelve weeks before she got home again. Just in time to nurse Mrs Barton. You know she died?"

"Yes," said Mr Pringle. "It's a poor look-out for the boy. Barton's such a careless chap. But how's Mrs Hammond?"

"Able to walk fairly well, and the Melbourne doctor said it had been well set, which makes me feel tall. But I began to feel quite afraid of having hurt ladies, and no one to care for them; happily, now it will be different with Mrs McLean here. But who is that riding through the scrub?"

In a few minutes they both recognised the manager at Yomola station, a Scotchman of the name of Mackenzie.

"Send Mackenzie into supper with us," he called to a man.

"How are you, Mackenzie? And how's all at Yomola?"

"Fine, there's a wee son, and Burns is that proud. The mistress is doing weel, and wee Annie's awful set on her brither. She is aye for havin' him, and her bit arms is no' lang enough or strong enough. Mrs Thompson is wi' them. Young Bill Thompson's in Melbourne, I'm hearin.' The elder brither and his wife's at hame, and Dick."

"And Bill has got home a wife, Mackenzie. Why

did you not try too?" said Mr Pringle.

"I am awa hame tae Edinburgh on the varra same errant, me and Bessie's been engaged six years come the New Year. Judge, if ye will lend me a horse I wad be gettin' on. I am no for missin' yon boat gin I can help it."

"You need not hurry, Mackenzie. She is not

due to sail till next week," said Mr Andrews.

"And has a split mast, so won't be ready even then," said Mr Pringle.

"I am obliged tae ye, Mr Pringle, but if Judge will lend me a horse, I'll awa after supper the nicht."

"Give him that huge waler you showed me just now, Andrews, the poor chap's afraid the sea will run away. Never mind, Mackenzie, I had the same complaint myself very badly more years ago than I care to count."

"What of Wattle Creek, Mackenzie? What is Barton going to do about poor little Pierce?"

"Naethin', just muddle on, but as soon as Mrs Burns is about again, she is going up to Wattle Creek to see about his claes, and bring him back to Yomola the whiles his faither is at the Geelong Races. He will live as much at Yomola as wi' yon feekless faither o' his. I am quite thinkin' it wad be far better to let the Burns have the wee chap all thegither, as they are wantin', till he is twelve,

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but Barton's no for partin' wi' him. Ae minute he spoils, and varra next, forgets and neglects the bairn, but he's gey fond till him. Now, Judge, I've had a grand supper, and if I may hae you horse, I'll be steppin' the noo, and thank ye kindly."

CHAPTER III

EARLY in the following week the McLeans arrived. McLean had been a little perturbed as to how his employer would take his marriage, and also his failure to get a housekeeper; but the letter which the buggy brought reassured him about that, and the warm greeting and careful preparation of such nice rooms for his wife, were very gratifying to him.

Mrs McLean soon made her presence felt on the station. Well-cooked and carefully prepared food, nice bread, instead of the never-ending flap-jacks, and cakes and scones and good, wellmade tea, soon improved the health and tempers of the men, and the desire to please one who was always planning for their comfort made them willingly take more care about their manners and language. Mr Andrews found this improvement specially marked some months after, in the shearing time, when some twenty-five or thirty extra hands were hired. Often he had had to interfere forcibly in rows and fights, especially if he had had to hire an excess of Irishmen for lack of others, which all station owners, even so long ago as 1845, dreaded, as they do to-day. Mr Andrews was a very big, powerful man, and his manager being the opposite, it always fell to his lot when force had to be used, and he had

had to knock three or four men down on several occasions.

But this time, all his own men were on the side of peace, and a "Stop it! Stop it, lads! You will terrify Mrs McLean if you fight, do remember!" nipped many a row among the rough fellows, to Mr Andrews' great joy, for he was a man who hated violence of any kind, though well able to use his fists if compelled to, and it was the happiest shearing time he had ever had as yet.

A great feature of the Nangwarry Station was the cat, at one time the only pussy in South Australia. On his voyage out, Mr Andrews had used the medical and surgical knowledge he had gained at Edinburgh University, to cure a bad hand for one of the crew, who was threatened with the loss of two poisoned fingers. The man was very grateful, and seeing Mr Andrews was very friendly with the ship cat, he brought out a fine young one with him on the next voyage, and with infinite trouble got Mrs Pussy Baudrons, as she was called, up the two hundred miles to Nangwarry, where she settled down most happily, and men would come riding into the station from long distances, to "get a sight of the cat"; many of the young Australians to see one for the first time, and others to refresh their memories of home by stroking pussy's fine fur. She tolerated them all, but did not make friends of any till Mrs McLean came, and at her delighted "Oh, a pussy! A pussy!" Mrs Baudrons jumped on to her knee.

Pussy lived till she was twenty-two years old, and not a snake escaped her lightning paw. She

always struck first and broke the reptile's neck, till old age and failing sight and quickness caused her to miss her shot one day, and in a few moments pussy was dead, and the whole station mourning over "poor old Baudrons."

CHAPTER IV

"There is another ealf missing, Mr Andrews," said McLean one day about two years after his marriage. "We must put a stop to this. There is a native camp near here, if we could only find it, but I cannot make out where. I wish we had a native tracker."

"Poor souls, they are hungry, no doubt. I do not think they are myal blacks. Their depredations are on too small a scale here. But, as you rightly say, McLean, it cannot be allowed to go on, and you and I had better go to-morrow and try to find them. Would Mrs McLean be afraid to be left for a day or two with just the station hands?"

"Not she. I asked her this morning, and she said with her new gun you gave her for the dingoes, and pussy for the snakes, she feels perfectly safe. I cannot persuade her the dingoes will keep well away from the station. Funny they are the only thing she fears."

"I will tell the men not to leave the station at all till we are back, and, McLean, bring some prospecting tools, we might want them. We must be off early in the morning. We will have to camp one night at any rate."

They searched the scrub for miles, but saw no traces of blacks, and the kangaroos and other creatures were feeding peacefully, especially the

shy Emu birds, which got up and ran when they saw the two men coming, showing they had not been disturbed before by natives.

McLean would have liked to have got a young kangaroo for his wife, but to have fired a gun would have warned the blacks that they were

coming.

Arriving at the end of Mr Andrews' land they camped for the night, and next day skirting along the boundary they began turning in again towards the station from the other side, but still saw nothing.

"What's that, McLean? I thought I heard like

a child crying. There it is again!"

"Sounds like some young thing, certainly,"

said the manager.

"Guns ready then," said Mr Andrews, "for if it is a native encampment, be sure they have seen

us long ago."

They rode earefully on till the scrub got too thick, then dismounting, listened again, and heard the loud, unmistakable yell of a distressed child, quite close by, and going a few steps forward, they saw a tiny black boy, about three years old, lying under a bush.

Mr Andrews lifted the little fellow up, and getting some water from a spring near by, he gave him a drink, and a large piece of Mrs McLean's nice sponge cake, which it ate, and then went off to sleep. It seemed very hungry and thirsty, but did not look at all starved. McLean in the meantime was searching for the camp.

"Come here, Mr Andrews! What do you make

of this?" he called from a rock a short distance away from where the child was found. "There is a dead woman, and the skins of your lost calves here."

Mr Andrews went forward to the place, where the emaciated body of a young Lubra lay.

"Poor soul! she has died of some wasting disease. She is only skin and bone. No doubt when she died, which must have been yesterday, I think, the rest abandoned the child, which they often do, when its mother is no longer able to carry it, but it looks as if a man and a woman or two had remained with her, which points towards their being half-civilised, and maybe they are hiding and watching us. I am going to take the child home to Nangwarry at any rate. I saw a dingo just now over there, and it would not be safe to risk their coming back. Now we will bury the poor little mother as deep as we can, for fear of those horrible brutes getting her."

It took two hours' hard toil to get a hole dug deep enough, and then wrapping her in the skins of the calves, they buried the Lubra, piling on the grave all the biggest stones and logs of dead wood they could find, and after feeding the child on what remained of the cake, Mr Andrews mounted his horse, McLean handed the laughing, chuckling baby up to him, and they started across country for the station about eight or nine miles away.

"I have often wished a native child could be brought up by white people, and now I have a chance of seeing what I can make of this little chap. If any of his people come to the station I will try

to get them to leave him or to live on the station themselves."

"Mrs McLean and I were just talking about the natives last night. She had never seen one till the Ballarat police sent their black tracker to you yesterday, and she is sorely puzzled about them, and so am I, especially after to-day. How is it possible that such queer, dwarf creatures can be made in the image of God, sir? It does not seem

right to think so, seems to me!"

"I have the same feeling myself, McLean, and feel sure they are the degenerate descendants of the first creation, when man developed gradually. The Bible distinctly has mention of them. remember, as a child, asking who Cain's wife was, and being sharply told not to ask silly questions. I wondered why it was an unwelcome enquiry. Silly, my common sense told me it was not, any more than to ask who was Abraham or Isaac's wife. Questions repeated about her, and Seth's son, and who was his mother, brought threats of punishment for being irreligious and drove me nearly into doubt. As I grew older, then I studied the matter for myself, and found that there were many passages in the Bible that took this first creation or gradual growth of man as an established fact. "Cain is in terror that all men will kill him." Unless there was a creation previous to that of his father and mother, there was no one to do it, he having killed Abel. Then we read of his finding a wife during his wanderings, of his brother Seth's son, which implies a wife for the former, and the marriage of Cain's own son, and the very names of many women, who were certainly not the daughters of Adam and Eve. All those people are spoken of as a matter of course and of common knowledge, and I came to the conclusion, whether a right or a wrong one I don't pretend to dogmatise, but it satisfies me, that all those people belonged to the first creation, and gradual development of man, and that Adam and Eve were a second, and much higher creation, endowed with full mental and spiritual gifts, "made in the image of God, after His likeness," and I believe that it was probably holding forbidden intercourse with those outside people that the fall and degeneration to a certain extent of the Adamine creation and the upraising and improvement of the earlier one is due. Those who, like the Australian natives, had no intercourse with the family of Adam, seem to have retrograded, and will soon, I feel sure, disappear altogether. It is a grievous mistake to hide, or slur over such questions with young people, and a very fruitful eause of unbelief among them. If the Church of the Middle Ages, instead of threatening death at the stake to those scientific men of their day, who maintained the world was round—if that Church. I say, had read their Bibles, they would have found that it could have taught them so in the words of the beautiful old song:

> 'Thou hast made the round world so sure That it cannot be moved;'

and there are many other facts, which are wrongly and foolishly ignored, and people, who might get a great help in research from it, are driven away from the old Bible by a narrow and often wrong interpretation of it. Now the little man, who is the innocent cause of this long, and I fear rather unorthodox harangue, is beginning to express a desire for supper. Yes, baby, we are nearly home now. There is the station."

The squalling of the black baby brought out the whole station, and Mrs McLean was delighted with him. The name of Willy was given him, and he was soon the pet and plaything of all the men.

CHAPTER V

Two native women were seen several times in the nearest scrub, and Mr Andrews had a present of food put for them near where he was pretty sure they were hiding. Next day they came to the station. One was an old woman, the other young, and she seemed far gone in consumption. McLean did all she could for her; a hut was made for them and one of the men rode to Ballarat to get the native tracker, called Musket, to come and interpret. Before he came, an old man with a great shock head of white, much frizzled hair arrived; he spoke a little English, and from him Mr Andrews learned that Willy was his grandson, the two young women were his daughters, and both had got ill at the time the tribe had robbed a station on the other side of Penola. The police had pursued them, and the two girls being too weak to keep up with the men had been left behind at the place where Willy was found, and he and his wife were abandoned further on, where, if Mr Andrews had gone some five or six miles into the neighbouring property, he would have found the tracks of both the natives and the police horses. The old people had gone back to the girls, and they lived as best they could till Willy's mother died; then hearing horses coming, and fearing his crying would attract the police, as they supposed it to be, they

ran away and left him to his fate. Returning next day, they found the police, as they thought, had

taken him away and buried his mother.

Mr Andrews invited them to remain, and asked the old fellow to let him have Willy, which he very willingly did, when Musket had explained with much difficulty, for they were of quite different tribes and spoke a different language, that "white fellow Judge want piecaninny black fellow for own."

A few weeks after, the sick girl died, and the old Lubra and black fellow disappeared for some years, till Willy was about twelve, when the man came back, and to Mr Andrews' great disappointment took Willy away. However, a few weeks after, Willy returned, very footsore, and informed Mr Andrews that "he only go visit black fellow. Nangwarry, Willy's home all right. Willy, white fellow Andrews, no belong black fellows any more."

By the time Willy was sixteen he was quite a man, and his marvellous powers of tracking both men and animals was of the greatest use on the station. Mr Andrews did not at all like those visits to his tribe, but found if he tried to prevent them, he would lose the black altogether. He had tried to teach Willy the rudiments of Christianity, but how much, or how little, he understood Mr Andrews never could find out, for the natives he found were reticent, but Willy was honest and faithful and greatly attached to his master, and Mr Andrews felt he could not ask more of him. And he hoped that it was not to take part in any tribal orgy that he went, for he returned the same simple, quiet fellow that he always was, and seemed

very glad to be home again. Willy was also much attached to Mrs McLean. "White Mary," he called her, as all the natives did the white women, and if Mr Andrews and her husband were both away from the station at the same time, Willy always remained with her, and whatever room she was in, she was sure to find Willy like a faithful dog lying across the door outside.

CHAPTER VI

When Willy was nearly seventeen there was a terrible drought in South Australia, which lasted for more than two years, during which little or no rain fell, and the sheep and cattle on many stations were dying in thousands, the owners being threatened with great loss, and in some cases absolute ruin; and at Nangwarry matters were getting very serious indeed.

The heat even for Australia was intense, and Willy had looked very miserable for some time, till very early one morning Mr Andrews was wakened by him looking quite his usual bright,

happy self again.

"Master! Master! look! look!"

"Well, Willy, what is it?" said Mr Andrews.

"Rain! he come berry quick, Master, plenty big rain to-day."

"Indeed, I hope so, Willy," said his sleepy master, turning to look in the direction that

Willy was pointing eagerly to.

There he saw a cloud like a huge black volcano in the sky out of which long, bright forks of lightning were playing in every direction. It was coming up rapidly from the north. He sprang to his feet, and ran shouting to alarm the house, while Willy went and woke up the men, but before half the precautions necessary could be taken, the

storm was on the station with a furious gust of wind and rivers of water poured down on the iron roofs, which the long heat and dryness had shrunk, and they leaked at every joint.

Mrs McLean and her two daughters sat on a table, with a waterproof sheet over them. Her husband and Mr Andrews stood nearly up to their knees in water, beside them. No one spoke, for in the din of wind, thunder and rain, to hear a word was impossible, but each and all were full of anxiety about Allan McLean, who had ridden to Penola the evening before to see a friend. True, his father had told him not to return till the following evening, but they all knew Allan was very anxious to get back, as he and his sisters were going two days after up to Yomola for Annie Burns' birthday party, and some new clothing Allan had got at Melbourne did not fit, and his mother was altering it for him; so, as the new moon had risen about three, they feared he might have started for home. Allan was between fifteen and sixteen, a wild, merry, romping boy, and one who would never think of the danger in crossing a small river on the road from Penola, which, though long dried up, would certainly in a few minutes be a raging flood in this weather.

In a few hours the wind and thunder and lightning ceased, but rain continued to pour till all the low lying land was under water.

McLean started off with two other men on the biggest and strongest horses in the station. Mr Andrews remained with the anxious mother and sisters, and well it was that he did so, for towards the second evening, he heard wild cries, howling, and lamenting, and saw eight or nine natives coming towards the station, with the Lubras following behind, the sign the visit was in friend-ship, and Willy, who had disappeared some hours before, and another very big native came behind, carrying what he soon saw was the body of Allan MeLean.

He went to meet them, and the men redoubled their yells, while the Lubras cried, shrieked and sereamed.

They had found him miles below the Penola road caught in the roots of a tree, with his horse beside him. Both were dead, and sadly mutilated.

"But how did you know, Willy, about it?"

asked his master in great distress.

"My brother call me, Master, say poor young white fellow drowned, tell Judge. Me afraid it white fellow Allan, but no say to white Mary till sure. All my people berry sorry for poor white Mary and him father."

"But, Willy, how could he call you? They

were twenty miles away."

"He tell water, water tell me all right, Master. Me go now and call white fellow McLean come home to poor white Mary," and he hurried away after the tribe, whom Mr Andrew had fed and liberally rewarded.

A pretty shady spot close to the station was carefully fenced in by the sorrowing station hands, who all loved the boy, and he was laid to rest, Mr Andrews reading the burial service.

He did not wait for McLean, as he thought it

would be hours before Willy could find him, as no doubt he would be searching with the men, who had gone with him, and probably the Penola police the upper part of the river, and he was very surprised when they rode in a few hours after, and evidently McLean, from his drawn sad face, knew what had happened.

"How did you hear, my poor fellow?" asked

Mr Andrews, some time after.

"In the strangest and most uncanny way, Andrews. We had stopped to get some food. All the Penola police were out. I will never forget Sergeant Mackie's kindness, he is a real good fellow. While we were resting, Bolo the black tracker went out and lay down by the water side. I thought just to get a drink, when suddenly I heard him talking, and evidently getting answers, and presently he got up and went and spoke to Mackie, pointing at me as he did so. Mackie looked at me in such a troubled way, I asked him what Bolo was saying, and he told me Allan was dead, so I rode home at once."

It is a strange fact that wireless telegraphy should have been known to Australia's wild men, and used by them, long before the scientific world of white men had the least idea of it at all. Mr Andrews often pondered in later days over the curious happenings in the floods, but he did not live long enough to know that Willy and his fellow blacks were just using the water as a medium of communication with each other; though the idea did occur to him, he dismissed it as an impossibility.

CHAPTER VII

Wishing to leave the stricken family for a while alone, Mr Andrews took Willy and as many provisions as they could carry, and went himself on foot to look for a large mob of cattle, which had disappeared, and he feared had all been drowned. As they slowly worked their way along the higher ground in the flooded scrub, they saw here and there a few sheep, and small bunches of cattle, which had managed to save themselves, but of the main mob not a trace could they find, and after wandering for four days, Mr Andrews got quite confused as to the direction the station lay in, and as they went travelling along the shore of a perfect inland sea, which they could neither get through nor round, he told Willy and asked him if he knew where they were. They had stopped for the night, and as it was very damp, Willy had made a native shelter hut of the great ferns on the shore of the lake.

"Which way should we go, Willy? I am quite bushed. It is well we can get plenty of food for the shooting, and there is more than enough of water, but I want to get home again."

"Master, Willy no can find road, plenty too much water, berry big waters. Willy ask brother come, and show way home, if master like? Me ask him come to-morrow?"

"Yes, Willy, do ask him, if you can find him. I am very tired, and will get a good sleep if I can."

Mr Andrews lay down in the shelter, but he found he could not sleep yet, and lay thinking of the McLeans, and the young life so early cut off, and he smiled sadly to himself as he thought of Stanley Burns' last visit, when he had come to Nangwarry with his father to invite the McLeans to Annie Burns' eighteenth birthday party.

They had stayed two days, and Stanley and Allan, being both about the same age, had had a rollicking time, for Stanley was even more wild than Allan. On the day they left, Mr Burns, McLean and he had been strolling about the station, talking of many local interests, and they had all at once heard great thuds, like heavy things in collision, accompanied by shouts of glee from the boys.

They all hurried to the spot to see what misehief they were after, and saw Stanley mounted on one, and Allan on the other of two most valuable rams, which he had paid £70 each for, an almost unprecedented sum for a ram in those early days, besides the expense of bringing them and their keeper out to Australia from the Glasgow cattle show, where an agent had bought them for Mr Mr Andrews.

Ordered by their irate parents to "Get off at once," the two young rascals, who were having a supposed tournament, they being the knights armed with sticks for lances, tried to obey, but the rams, who were good friends and had no wish to fight, and whose heads were sore with the bangs their riders had driven them against each other

with, now turned on their tormentors and chased them round the paddock, while the boys tried to make for a tree.

Mr Andrews had sent for the keeper, who arrived with all the station hands, and who was bursting with indignation, while the other men roared with laughter. The boys at last got out, and were at once pounced upon by the angry fathers, whom he had much ado to appease, while at the same time he tried to make the culprits see that not only had they endangered their own lives, but, if the rams horns had got badly locked together, and the men not been able to separate them, they would have had to shoot both beasts, or they would have been starved to death, for it was no uncommon sight in the serub to see two skeletons with heads firmly entangled where rams had had a fight.

Since that Allan dared not cross the rams' paddock, as the two always attacked him, to the great amusement of the station. And now in the same paddock under the tree, they had buried all that remained of the merry boy.

He wondered what the McLeans would do, for in her distress Mrs McLean had said she wanted to go home. Mr Andrews doubted if McLean could afford it, and if he dared offer to lend the money, as he would be delighted to do. Thinking of all this, he watched the creseent moon rise behind the hills opposite, and as soon as its reflection touched the water, he saw Willy go down, and, lying at the margin, give a call, which he repeated twice; then he talked to the water in his own language for some time, and came up and peeped

into the shelter. Seeing his master was awake he said:

"Master, my brother come all right in morning."

"How do you know, Willy?"

"Me talk him just now. He over there, master," pointing across the lake.

"How did you make him hear you?"

"Willy tell water, water tell my brother, master."

"Did it, Willy? I will be very glad if he comes," and Mr Andrews went off to sleep, smiling at what he considered the black's simplicity.

"Master! Master! wake up! My brother come, say, berry long road home, must go plenty soon, if get home to-night."

Mr Andrews opened his eyes. It was just beginning to get light, and he saw the same big black standing with a friendly grin on his face beside him.

The two natives had a good fire burning, and the kettle boiling, also a bird they had shot with Willy's gun was nearly cooked; so breakfast did not take long.

"Master, my brother he say plenty big mob on hill over there. Black bull me sure your's, red cow with black calf with him. Willy think Bully Boy and red cow the piccaninny black bull mother."

"Indeed I trust it is them, Willy, for if that mob is drowned I am a poorer man than I care to be. Come on, let us go and see if they are mine."

The cattle were the missing mob, and there were many sheep also on this hill, and though numbers of beasts were lost, still the larger part remained. As the scrub between this hill and their usual grazing ground was now getting green with the fresh springing grass, and their heads were in the right direction, they were left to make their way home themselves, and a few miles further on McLean and three of the men met them, with the horses, which were very welcome.

"How is Mrs McLean?" said Mr Andrews. "I

have been very anxious about her."

"She is much more resigned, and when I spoke of her going home to see her mother, she said she would like to some day, when we could all go. I wrote for her, and told the old lady about Allan."

"Then be sure to go whenever she would like it. You can take two years' furlough any time you choose, McLean. You have well earned it, and if I can facilitate the holiday in any way, be sure it will be the greatest pleasure to me to do so."

"Thank you very much, Andrews, but I am not anxious to go. I feel all the ambition is knocked out of me. I had been saving to buy Allan a fruit farm, when he was twenty-one, but that was not to be, and if my wife wishes to go home, we can do it quite well, but I am shy of her relations. They were not pleased at the marriage, for, though very poor, they are an old family, while I am the son of an emigrant ploughman, and have had no education. I won't feel at all happy, I am sure."

"You have no reason to worry about that, McLean. You could give points to many a man who has had a small fortune wasted on trying to educate him. And you hold your own with them

all, McLean. Begin as you intend to go on. Don't take any cheek from Grannic, or any of them."

Tales of woe came pouring in from all quarters. Some unfortunate station owners were ruined altogether, others, especially among the fruit farms, it would take years to recover.

Perhaps the hardest case of all in the district was that of Bill Thompson, for not only was his great orchard destroyed, but a flash of lightning burnt his pretty little house, and everything in it.

As magistrate, Mr Andrews had a busy time adjusting quarrels over claims on the insurance companies, over damage done by the straying cattle, and what was most difficult of arrangement, the changes in the river's bed which took place. No record of any other such storm was to be had. Even the natives had no tradition of any such "muchie big big waters" before.

All this kept Mr Andrews constantly in Melbourne, and news came to him there that, in trying to turn a mob of terrified cattle, Mr Barton of Wattle Creek had been killed by a bull, and a money-lender at Geelong had foreelosed and seized the station, which he had sold for far more than poor Barton's debts, and that Pierce had gone to Penola and enlisted in the constabulary, refusing to fight Jacobstein in the Courts, though all Geelong was furious at the iniquitous advantage taken of him, and many letters reached "Judge Andrews" begging him to interfere. As soon as he possibly could, Mr Andrews hurried off to Penola, to enquire into the matter.

Having business at Connel's Inn he spent the night there, and riding through the scrub next morning, he met a tall handsome policeman, who smilingly saluted.

For a moment Mr Andrews did not recognise

him, then it dawned on him who it was.

"Well, Pierce, my boy, I was on my way to see you at Penola. I heard about your father's death, poor fellow, when in Melbourne, but I could not get away to go to Wattle Creek. Everyone is saying Jacobstein had cheated you abominably, and turned you out. Let me investigate the matter for you, Pierce."

"Yes, Mr Andrews, Jacobstein has cheated, like, well, the German Jew that he is, but you see, sir, I cannot expose him without also exposing poor Dad's failing as well. I know that you are aware of it, for you saw him at the Melbourne races yourself; he had been drinking very badly in that hot time we had before the storm. I would much rather lose the money than have to rake up the terrible story of drink and gambling that has made my life a perfect hell at Wattle Creek for the last few years. I am very happy as a policeman. My comrades are real good fellows, and I feel so free and clean, without all those horrible debts. Of course, my position socially is not the same as a station owner, but one must just take the rough with the smooth. Anyway, it is a far better life to live than the biggest station and debts owing."

"That you are a policeman will make no difference to your friends, my boy. What does Annie

Burns say to it?"

"The same as you do, Mr Andrews. They are all very kind to me at Yomola."

"I would like to make that slippery rogue disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains, but would you

like to go back to Wattle Creck, Pierce?"

"No sir, never again. I am not cut out for that sort of life at all. Jacobstein has sold the station to a man of the name of McCarthney. I don't much like his looks, and Mr Burns positively dislikes him, a most unheard-of attitude for him, he is so kind."

"Well, good-bye for the meantime, Pierce. I think as I am nearer Yomola than Nangwarry, I will go on and see Burns, and stay the night; but don't you go and imagine that Pierce the policeman is less thought of than Pierce the station proprietor, my boy, for it certainly is not the case, I assure you. You heard about Allan McLean no doubt?"

"Indeed I did, poor little chap; he was such a jolly fellow. It has sobered Stanley very much. Annie cried herself sick. She was very fond of Allan."

CHAPTER VIII

Things went on as usual at Nangwarry for the next two years. Mr Andrews was away at Melbourne on magisterial business a great deal, for bushranging had broken out again after some years' interval, and there were several hold-ups of stations, which not only were robbed of money, plate, and horses, but in some cases the proprietors were shot, notably a Mr Day of Boboberry station, who was killed by a notorious scoundrel nicknamed Crackshot, who, not content with shooting Mr Day, wantonly shot a poor old black Lubra who looked after the pigs and hens in the yard.

Mrs McLean's health and low spirits were a source of great anxiety to her husband and daughters. So when a letter came to Mrs McLean announcing the death of an aunt, who had left her £800, McLean said it would be well spent in going home on a visit to her mother with the girls.

Another letter followed from her mother, who had inherited the property, and as the aunt had been very saving, not to say penurious, she was now very well off, and she begged her daughter to bring the girls home to see her. A rather cold invitation was extended to McLean, who only accepted it as he could not let his wife travel so far with only the help of two inexperienced girls of eighteen and fifteen. Allan came between them.

McLean made up his mind that, after seeing the great Edinburgh doctor, and when Mrs McLean was better, he would leave them at her mother's place, and return to Australia for a year, and if his wife did not at the end of that time wish to come out, he would go home for good, and take up a small farm, but he earnestly hoped she would be content to return to Australia.

Bill Thompson and his wife, who were living with his brother, had asked Mr Andrews to try to get him some employment till he could afford to rebuild his house. His partner was roughing it in a tent, while the damaged trees were growing up again, and when Mr Andrews asked them to come and take McLean's place at Nangwarry they were only too delighted, and came at once, enabling the McLeans to start so as to arrive just as the Scottish summer, or what stands for it, would be beginning.

Mrs McLean, very much more cheerful, the girls nearly erazy with delight, and their father, a very reluctant and sad man, left Nangwarry early one morning, accompanied by Mr Andrews and Willy, who waited in Melbourne to see them off, and then returned home.

CHAPTER IX

Mr Andrews ever since he came out to Australia had always had a great desire to witness the Corroboree, that strange native dance of the myal blacks, which was supposed to be some kind of semi-religious festival, always taking place at the full moon, which shines in Australia with a brilliance we in Britain never see. By questioning Willy, when the latter grew up, so far as Mr Andrews could make out, Australia's wild men in common with all human beings, no matter how degraded (and perhaps the Australian native was the most degraded of all, especially the Lubras) have some dim glimmering of God, be it ever so little and crude.

He found there was a small creature of the insect kind, which makes and carries on its back a sort of tiny beehive house, probably a nest for its eggs, or young, and no native would wilfully injure it.

Often Mr Andrews was secretly amused to see Willy's elaborate precautions not to appear even to notice, or be the least concerned about the creature, while really earefully avoiding injuring it, and he had asked the men to be careful not to hurt Willy's feelings by uselessly killing them; fortunately they were rare, and never came about the station. Mr Andrews found that the creature was not worshipped itself, but seemed to be regarded by

the natives as a symbol of the Creator. The blacks were very jealous of white men seeing their Corroborees, and it would be certain death for anyone caught watching them. They danced armed with their spears, knobkerries, boomerangs and other weapons, and a kind of mad fury seemed to possess them, in which they often killed the unhappy Lubras. For this reason, Mr Andrews had never been able to gratify his curiosity to witness a dance. A native guide was necessary to find the place, where a tribe of some two hundred myal or wild blacks assembled usually for their Corroboree, called Kalangadoo, and the McLeans were dead against his going, as were all the station hands, and he could not well go quite alone. McLean had declared that if Mr Andrews insisted on going, he was going too, and of course with his wife and children that could not be, and Mr Andrews would not take an unwilling man into the great danger. So he had quite given up all hope of seeing a Corroboree, when an opportunity occurred.

About a year after the McLeans went home, one of the large newspapers sent out a young artist, of the name of Rolands, with a letter of introduction to Mr Andrews, asking him to show Rolands what he could of Australian life for some sketches for their paper.

"Patience rewarded," said Mr Andrews to himself. "Here is my chance. Roland is a fine, cool, brave young fellow, and most interested in the natives, besides being a good shot, he does not care what risk he runs, nor what privations he has to endure, provided he gets a good picture."

He told Rolands how he had often longed to see a Corroboree, and asked him if he was inclined to take the risks.

"Oh yes! Mr Andrews, that will be grand. Can we go now? I am just tingling to be off, sir."

"Not till the full moon. I will call Willy, and ask him, but I fear he will not be very willing to go, poor chap, for my sake; he takes great eare of me, indeed his attentions to my safety are sometimes rather embarrassing, and amuse the station hands."

"Make him go, Mr Andrews. Tell him I have a little magic gun, that kills five men at once. I will get it out and show him what a revolver can do."

"Besides Willy, we won't tell anyone but Bill Thompson" said Mr Andrews, "but someone at the station must know, in case we do not come back."

Willy was very, very unwilling at first, and ex-

postulated with his master.

"Plenty bad black fellow at Kalangadoo. Kill master and white fellow Rolands, kill poor Willy too. White fellow M'Lean and white Mary say, master no can go. Very dangerous."

"Oh no, Willy, I will take care of your master. Got a gun that will kill five fellows at once. Do

come like a good fellow."

"Come along, boy, I want very much to go," said Mr Andrews.

"White Mary very angry with master, when she come back, say bad Willy, no take care of master, when am away. Well, if master will go, no tell nobody, all along big secret belong master and white fellow Rolands, Willy too.

"Certainly, Willy, we are not going to tell any one but Mr Thompson who will only wish he could go too; we don't want the whole station running at our heels, crying, 'Come back, come back.' like the birds."

"When do we start, Willy?" said Mr Rolands anxiously.

"Plenty big moon, Saturday, master. Take one, two, three days get Kalangadoo. Master take um gun, white fellow Roland many little guns in one, too, kill plenty bad black fellows for master."

"I trust we won't have to kill any, Willy, at all. Now I suggest a good long rest to-night, so early to bed for us all."

CHAPTER X

THE next morning they started in most delightful weather, it was not too hot, nor was the ground dry, for the terrible storm two years before had thoroughly soaked the soil to a great depth, and some good showers a few days before had made everything green, and the condition of the cattle and sheep rejoiced the heart of their owner. There was a promise of a great crop of wool for the next shearing, as a most unusual number of sheep had two lambs now growing big, and the animals were all very fat and healthy looking, the wool also was thick and fine.

As they progressed into the wilder scrub there were quantities of kangaroo, wallaby, and opossum, besides many other creatures, while the shy emus were in great numbers. Mr Rolands was much taken with the curious lyar bird, and at first delighted with the impudent, noisy parrots in their gay plumage, but when they stopped for a meal, he was soon glad to stone them away with clods of grass, to stop the deafening row the birds made. There were other creatures as beautiful but more dangerous, and a sharp look out was kept, for snakes, glistening like jewels in the sunshine, but deadly if touched, were plentiful.

After crossing Nangwarry property and a part

of a neighbouring station, they got into the wild unowned scrub.

Hitherto they could have used horses if they had desired, but that would have necessitated taking a man with them to take their steeds back to the station, and he would have at once guessed where they were going and alarmed the station when he got home, which was just what they wanted to avoid.

Now they constantly had to cut their way through the dense masses of mimosa with its overpowering scent, wattles, fern of every sort, from the great tree ferns down to the small dainty rock ones, and the trees were a never-ending wonder and delight to young Rolands, who would have liked to stop every few minutes and sketch the scene.

Their third and last camp was about eight miles from their destination, under a magnificent gum tree, all festooned with the purple and red Australian pea, which contrasted with its own lovely grey foliage. Mr Andrews and Rolands gazed in delight, but Willy, more prosaic, climbed up and got some tender young opossums he spied in a hole for supper, for here they dared not fire a gun in case a wandering native should hear it.

Willy also secured a species of giant slug which he ate with great enjoyment, after vainly pressing it hospitably on his master and Mr Rolands. Coming back at Mr Rolands' request, Willy fried one for him, which he found really very nice, though Willy said:

"White fellow spoil it all along if cook um. Black fellow just catch um and eat um up.

After supper Willy disappeared in the direction of Kalangadoo to see if the natives had assembled.

Mr Rolands made some *sketches, and they eaught and examined one of the little sacred beetles with its house on its back, as Willy was not there. Whey they thought he might be returning they put it in safety on another tree.

It was getting very dark when Willy came back, but the full moon was due to rise in about an hour, and he assured them there was abundance of time for, "Black fellow no begin till moon up, plenty feast before dance. Moon high up in tree then."

They went very cautiously after the first four miles, and at last began to hear in the distance shouts and singing. Willy crept to a thicket of mimosa bush, and they followed. Then whispering to them to be quite still he left them.

Looking through the screen of bush they saw what Mr Rolands afterwards described as like a scene in the inferno.

The moon shining with a brilliance we in this climate have no conception of, was high in the heavens, glowing through the branches of three gigantic trees, below burnt a great fire, and under the gum trees sat the Lubras clapping their hands, and in an open glade beyond danced and gesticulated, sang and shouted, a crowd of some two hundred black men waving spears, their bodies painted in the most curious manner, yellow ochre seemed to be the favourite colour.

One small pocket handkerchief would much more



Corroboree Kalangadoo, South Australia, 1853



than have contained the whole assembly's wardrobe. Only the men were painted and were by far the greater number. Mr Andrews could only count five children among them all.

The men advanced and retired in rows, somewhat like the figures of a quadrille, singing, and every now and then the Lubras burst out into a shrill screaming reply. Then the fingers of the dance seemed to change till the Lubras again replied, when another dance began, each one wilder and more grotesque than the last.

Mr Andrews and his friend stood watching the strange scene, quite fascinated by it, for how long they had no idea at the time, but afterwards found it was two hours. Then Willy came back.

"Come now, master. They soon get quite mad, run about and find master, and white fellow Rolands, then kill um. They plenty bad myal fellows, often kill poor Lubra after dance. We go away."

Reluctantly they followed Willy cautiously through the path they had made in coming till they got back to their camping-place, where they sat down to rest, while Willy retraced his steps to make sure they had not been followed.

"Well, Rolands, you and I have seen what in a few years will have ceased to be; did you notice how few children there were. I could only count five, and most of the men I am pretty sure were middle-aged. It was indeed well worth coming so far to see. Was it not?"

"I would not have missed it for a fortune. I have a grand picture of it in my mind."

"When the full moon her glorious orb displays, Australia's wild men, joyous 'neath her rays, Smeared o'er with paint, in rude fantastic glee, Dance, shout, and sing their strange Corroboree."

quoted Mr Andrews.

"Now, are you tired? or shall we go on when Willy comes back?"

"Let us do whatever your black fellow wants. He has been a real brick about it all," said Mr Rolands.

Willy came in a few minutes after.

"Master, they berry mad, and fight now. Two black fellow, one Lubra, kill already. If white fellow Rolands able, we better go on."

"Yes, indeed, Willy, we will get out of this. Eight miles is not nearly far enough if they are

fighting for us to be safe from them."

They walked on steadily till out of the myal bush, as it was called, altogether, and then Willy's spirits rose, and he sang and laughed and talked, showing how very uneasy he had been about their safety, and both his master and his master's guest admitted to each other that one Corroboree was as much as they wanted.

They lingered in the home scrub for Rolands to make the rough sketch for his picture, which he afterwards gave to Mr Andrews, till one day they saw a cavalcade approaching of all the station hands, with Bill Thompson, his wife, who had refused to be left behind, Sergeant Mackie with a posse of police, among which was a very anxious Pierce Barton; all come to look for them. Bill Thompson had got nervous and the police having

camped at Nangwarry on one of their rounds, he had confided the whole story to Mackie.

"And then the fat was in the fire," said Mr

Andrews, laughing.

"Deed it wasna a wiselike thing for ye to be doin', Judge. Ye ought to ken what devils they myal blacks are. Bolo's welcoming Willy as if he was back from the deid."

"You won't get either me or Rolands to say we wish we had not gone if you are trying to, Mackie," laughed the Judge. "We glory in it."

"Pierce Barton tellit me yon daft faither o' his took him to Kalangaloo one night to see 'em dance. They was near caught, for Pierce was just a laddie, and he fair roared wi' laughing at the paint, and nae claes on them. His dad thought they was done for, but luckily the grass took fire, and the blacks ran for their lives. Barton and Pierce got into a cave. I am thankful ye are both alive."

"Where were you going, Mackie, when Thompson

got hold of you?" asked Mr Andrews.

"Up to Geelong about all this cattle-thieving. Twice lately men have seen beasts there they could have sworn were their ain, but other brands, or nane, were on them. We will cut across the scrub to the road now you are hame again, Judge."

"Take Rolands with you, Mackie, will you?"

"Please let me come, Sergeant. I would like a fight with the cattle thieves, and camping out is grand."

"Varra glad to have ye, but they are ower

cannie to fight us. We could soon do for them, then, Mr Rolands."

After a week's very enjoyable round with the police, Rolands returned to Nangwarry for a night, and then left for Melbourne to get a ship for Liverpool.

Before the expedition to see the Corroborce, a letter had come from McLean saying the great Edinburgh doctor hoped in about six months to be able to do something for Mrs McLean. He seemed happier, and had found a cousin of his wife's, a man of considerable wealth, and heir to more and a title, very friendly to him. McLean and he were about the same age.

Willy, who had gone down to Melbourne to see Rolands off on his own account—"Plenty good, white fellow Roland, wish stay with master all along, me go see him on ship," he had told his master—brought back some letters with him.

One was from Mrs McLean to Mr Andrews telling him of Ida's marriage to the cousin, Mr Campbell. She seemed very pleased, and said that they were going to leave Janet at school near her grandmother, but she herself was coming back to Australia with her husband as soon as the doctor would allow her to travel.

McLean did not seem quite so happy about the girls and the marriage, but very glad his wife wished to return to Australia. Mr Andrews gathered from the letter that the hard, worldly old grandmother had somewhat successfully tried to make the foolish young girls despise their father and he was very sorry for McLean.

Then followed a long, long silence. Mr Andrews wrote, and got no answer; he wrote again, and the letter was returned with a curt "not known here" written across it, in writing he knew to be the grandmother's, and he felt very anxious about McLean. Mrs McLean, he was sure, had died.

Willy had gone on one of his visits to his rapidly diminishing tribe, and the men were very busy with incessant boundary riding, owing to the cattle-stealing which was getting worse and worse, and Mr Andrews thought, as he could not spare a man to go, that he would ride down to Connel's Inn on chance that the Geelong coach might have left a letter there for him. Riding by the shortest way through the scrub, he saw a man on one of Connel's horses coming towards him, and recognised McLean. His hair was quite grey and he was dressed in a shabby worn-out suit, and looked twenty years older than the smart, spruce, fair-haired man who had left Nangwarry two and a half years before.

"McLean! McLean! my dear fellow, how glad I am to see you," he cried. "No, don't try to tell me, I feel we are all now the poorer of her gracious presence. Come away home, and we will all be happier together. I cannot tell you how badly I have wanted you times without number, and now especially, for there is a wholesale thieving of cattle going on all over the colony which hitherto has baffled detection, and there are rumours about McCarthney who bought Wattle Creek, being not on the square. I must try to discover who is really in the business, and news of bushranging

beyond Geelong came in to-day, so I ought to be in Melbourne, but Bill Thompson went home to his fruit farm last month, and I could not leave the station for long, as we are boundary riding every day to watch the cattle."

"I am glad the Thompsons are away, for they would be asking questions about things I do not wish anyone but you, Andrews, to know about."

"Are you in any hurry to get home to-day? I would rather not appear in daylight in this rig. Fact is, I was quite broke, and worked my passage out, and I believe it saved me an illness, for we were short-handed, and I got no time to fret over

my troubles."

"Let us go to the Giant Gum at Walla, McLean, by the ford and hobble the horses. There was some very nice feed for them I noticed as I passed, and we can have our talk there. It will be better to get home at dusk, for the men have been arranging a great reception, and if they saw you coming it would at once begin. They would not care two-pence about your coat, McLean, but I fear you have had a very bad time of it. Now here we are, and first we will have these sandwiches and a smoke. I never trust Connel for sandwiches. His are abominable.

I had to go there for a horse, so I just told him my wife was dead, and I had to work my passage, and asked him not to say anything. He was most kind; wanted to lend me clothing and money. Now for my story. When Elsie died some weeks after the operation we had returned to her mother's. Janet was sent for as it was near the holidays and

her mother wanted to have her. The day after the funeral Grannie sent for me, and gave me an ultimatum, either to give up the child to her, or take her, and go. Janet cried and begged to stay with Grannie, and what could I do but agree. The old lady enquired when I intended to leave her house, and I said, "then," and went the same day to Liverpool, dismayed at finding that after paying the next quarter for Janet's school fees my account was overdrawn. I sold all my smart togs, and just had enough to pay off the bank, and my fare to Liverpool, where I had some heavy baggage stored, which I also sold, and it kept me till I got a sort of handyman's place on a ship. I had to borrow from the shipping company to pay off my landlady, which came out of the wage, so I landed with five shillings in my pocket and the coach fare. Fortunately, both coachman and guard were strangers, and I was only a few minutes in Melbourne. So here I am, with neither wife nor child, for I am under no delusions as to Grannie's letting either Ida or Janet write if she can prevent it, Andrews."

"What of Ida's husband, McLean?"

"He is a very good fellow, but like all the family eannot call his soul his own for that old harridan. It is incomprehensible to me how they can submit to it—money, I suppose. They are gone abroad for a couple of years. I wrote to Ida to Paris, and she will get the letter sometime, I hope. Perhaps she may write. Give me plenty of work, Andrews. It is the best cure, and now I am home I feel a different man and life worth living again. To be

liked and wanted instead of being one too many is most exhilarating to a fellow."

"And wanted at Nangwarry you most decidedly

are, McLean," said Mr Andrews.

"It will be quite dark enough now, by the time we are home, and I will just slip into my room, get a change—I left some clothing behind when we went—and a shave. What do you advise me to say to people? I thought just that I had left Janet with her grandmother till she was grown up, and they know Ida was married. It is getting no letters from them will cause remarks, I fear."

"No, McLean, for I had some time ago found some of mine, regarding magisterial affairs, had been opened and read, and my letters are brought in a sealed bag now. I will tell the Post Office to put yours in too, and no one will see the contents but you and me. Besides there is nothing like travelling for enlarging people's minds, and I think you will find Ida won't submit for long to that old cat. Janet, poor child, is different, at least for some years. She is a slave to the grandmother. You will be sorry, McLean, to hear Baudrons was killed by a snake a year ago."

"Poor old pussy. I feared it would come to

that. She was getting blind."

"Hi, Mitchell!" shouted Mr Andrews, as they waited at the station gate.

"Yes, sir. You did not go on to Connel's after

all, Mr Andrews, then?"

"I did not need to. I found McLean in the scrub halfway home. Just open the gate and let

him through quietly. He is in no humour for a reception, poor fellow."

McLean went off to his room, and the man, who was an old hand, turned to Mr Andrews enquiringly.

"What of Mrs McLean, sir?"

"She died nine months ago, Mitchell. Mrs Campbell and her husband are in France, and little Janet with her grandmother till she is grown up. He could not have her here very well, poor fellow. Ask the men not to question him, he is very sensitive about his troubles and does not like to speak of them."

Next morning McLean looked much more himself, and a handshake and a few words of regret was all the men said and did.

Willy was in great distress, and Mr Andrews had some difficulty in preventing his tribe, who were in the neighbourhood, coming to howl and lament their kind friend, white Mary. He sent Willy with a message to Yomola to tell them about the McLeans, and then went down to Melbourne where there was much business awaiting him, while McLean gradually recovered health and spirits by throwing himself into all the work and doing "as much as three of us," the men declared.

PART II

ANNIE BURNS

CHAPTER I

"Please don't go, Jack," said Mrs Burns. "You are not fit for it, indeed you are not. See how swollen your poor foot is, if you force your riding boots on the skin will break, and you may lame yourself for months. Now do be reasonable, my dear man."

"My dear, I would not think of going, if it were not that McCarthney insists I have got some of his cattle running with mine, and you know how touchy he is. I am rather afraid, too, that he is right about it, for that storm we had about a fortnight ago was most alarming for young cattle, and a small bunch would be very likely to join a big mob for safety."

"And, may I ask, what is the good of having the best manager in South Australia, as all the neighbours admit, if you cannot trust such a small

matter to him, Jack?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. Mackenzie would do it as well as myself, if it were anyone but McCarthney; but Alec always quarrels with him. He accuses McCarthney of having diddled me over those heifers, and to tell you the truth, Ellen, he is not far wrong. McCarthney is not straight; but I

do not want a row between them if I can help it. Andrews thinks very badly of McCarthney, and warned me to have no dealings I could help with him. It is sad to think such a man as Paddy Snateh, as the men call him, should have poor Barton's station. An honest, kindly fellow he was, and Pierce is a fine lad."

"Mackenzie! Mackenzie! Come into the sitting-room. I want to speak to you," cried Mrs Burns, as she finished dressing her husband's foot, and then helped him into the large room which

served as both dining and sitting-room.

"Aye, Mrs Burns, was ye wantin' me?" said a tall elderly man, who crossed the station yard and came into the room, leaving the group of horsemen who were waiting by the gates for their master to join them for a round-up of lost eattle some miles away. The whole neighbourhood for a hundred miles round were to be at it, as cattle had been disappearing in a most uncanny manner for the last two or three years; and to add to the trouble, one of Australia's few and far between, but terrible when they did come, storms had apparently driven cattle in large numbers into a great stretch of thin scrub in the direction of Wattle Creek, a station thirteen or fourteen miles away from Yomola, the Burns station.

"Alec, do come and talk to Mr Burns. Tell him he must not go to the round-up. Help me to persuade him, Mackenzie. Just look at his

swollen foot."

"Deed aye, he's got a fut on him, and nae

mistake. Ye'll no' be for riding the day, I'm

thinkin', Master Burns, surely?"

"I doubt if I can, Mackenzie," ruefully replied his master, as a twinge of pain shot up to his knee.

"For why did ye no' let me fetch the buggy yesterday? I kent ye had hurt yersel', but if I had had ony idea ye had gin yer fut sic a like stob, ye wad na hae got leave to walk hame. Man, Burns, it was a daft like thing to do."

"You are right, Mackenzie, I ought not to have walked, but it was such a short distance," said Mr Burns, laughing. "But, Alec, don't fight with McCarthney, like a good fellow, when neither Mr Andrews nor I am there to keep the peace between you."

"Na, I'll no feeht wi' him, Burns, the day. Make yer mind casy o' that. Maybe Andrews will be getting him soon, a dirty cattle thief, that's what Paddy Snatch is, Mistress Burns; it's he that's got yer bonnie heifers, ta hound. Will Judge no' be at the round-up, was ye saying, Burns ?"

"No. Mackenzie, he could not get in time, and he asked me to look out for that fine young black bull he was so vexed at losing. Try and see if you can find it for him, Alec, it is a valuable beast."

"I will dae that, Andrews is a canny Scot, and a just man forbye. Maybe if you was askin' McCarthney he could tell ye where yon bull is, same place as yer heifers, I am thinkin', Burns."

"Imphm."

"Now I'll be after the lads if yer no' wantin' me mair."

Mr Burns limped out after him to the veranda.

"Sam!" he shouted to a lad about sixteen who stood by the gate. "I have hurt my foot and am not able to go, so you can, and you may ride the roan if you like."

"Oh thank you, sir!" cried the boy, as he ran and mounted the horse that was waiting for

Mr Burns.

"Come on, Sam, it is jolly to have you, old ehap," said Stanley Burns, Mr Burns' eldest son, who was nineteen.

"Now, don't you two be getting into any misehief this time," shouted Mr Burns, as the two

lads rode off together.

"I have let Sam go, Ellen," he said to his wife.

"The lad was looking so wistfully at the horses, and I had promised him a gallop on the roan some day. I hope Stanley and he won't get into any scrapes, but Mackenzie will keep them in order, no doubt."

"Better than you can, dear Jack. I am so glad you gave Sam such a treat, he well deserves it. Fancy! the grandeur of riding your horse; he is a good quiet boy, but Stanley has got much steadier lately, don't you think so? and more considerate?"

"Oh, Stanley is all right, my dear. I was not exactly a pattern when I was his age; but I agree with you, he has become much more of a man since Annie and he stayed at the Thompsons'."

Billy, the youngest boy, aged ten, dragged a

comfortable armchair to the table, and Gladys and Jane, the twins, who were six, brought a big stool for their father's foot.

"Thank you, little people. Papa is a lame duck to-day and must stay in the house. Billy, my son, can I trust you to ride over after breakfast to old Williams' hut by yourself, and take a message to him for me?"

"Yes. Oh, do let me go, papa! And if Williams is not too busy, can he go 'possum hunting with me?"

"What does mamma say to that?" said Mr Burns.

"I say yes, certainly, if Billy will promise not to do anything rash, or that Williams objects to. I will give you a nice basket of fruit, and things to take him."

Mrs Mackenzie came into the room just then with a tray full of dishes, for breakfast. She always took her meals with the Burns when her husband and son were away. Sam was the Mackenzies' only child.

"We have kept you such a time waiting for your breakfast, Mrs Mackenzie," said Mr Burns.

"Not at all, Mr Burns. I had a cup of tea with Alec and Sam before they left. See, Billy, like a good boy, fetch in the milk for Annie. She has both the coffee and the scones to bring."

Billy, who was wild with excitement at this, his first expedition alone, on station business, rushed into the kitchen, seized a large jug of milk, and tore back to the room, coming in violent collision with his eldest sister, whose dress was promptly soaked with coffee and milk.

"Billy! Billy! don't be so rough, you might have scalded Annie badly," said his father.

"Please don't mind, Papa, there is no harm done. My dress was dirty already; but if you will excuse me, I will go and change, and have my breakfast later on."

"I am so sorry, sissie. It was beastly of me," said Billy.

"Don't worry, old boy. The new soap is ready at last, so it can be washed to-morrow."

Annie, who was twenty-two, ran laughing out into the veranda, which went round the house as was the usual way in Australia in those days; each room opened into it, and Annie's own room had another door into her father's and mother's room, which had also a door into the passage opposite the sitting-room. The boys' room, the nursery, and several other rooms, as well as the kitchen, were at the other end of the house. Annie got out a nice blue print dress and began leisurely to change into it. She hoped the others would have finished, and that her father would sit with her while she ate her breakfast, and that she might have a private talk with him, a treat not often enjoyed and particularly welcome just now, for Annie did long to know if Pierce Barton was likely to be kept in the police force of their district.

The son of an old friend and neighbour who had owned Wattle Creek station, now the property of an Irishman named McCarthney, who was more than suspected of being a cattle thief, Mr Barton was a kindly, easy-going man, as careless about his financial affairs as he was reckless about

personal safety; and when he was killed by a savage bull that he had foolishly got in the way of, Pierce Barton found that the station must be sold to pay the debts, and he must find work. So he enlisted in the Australian police force.

If he had been able to keep the station, Annie Burns would have been Mrs Pierce Barton a couple of years ago, but Pierce was proud and was afraid to ask Mr Burns to consent to Annie's marrying a mere policeman. Could he have summoned courage to do so, he would have met with a ready consent, for Mr Burns and his wife were not worldly people and only desired to see Annie happy.

As for Annie herself, she wanted Pierce only, and his being a policeman or a millionaire made

no difference to her.

As she got ready she hoped her father would say something about Pierce; if not, she decided to speak to her mother, who, she knew, greatly desired to see Annie and Pierce married.

Finished dressing, she was just going to run back to the sitting-room by way of the veranda, when her heart seemed for a moment to stand still as she heard a loud, harsh voice shout, "Bail up!" and knew her father was in the hands of bushrangers, those terrors of the lonely stations, surrounded by miles and miles of wild bush, where those miscreants hid, some seventy and eighty years ago. Annie stole quietly into her father's room, opened noiselessly a drawer, where she knew he kept a pair of pistols, and crept silently to the open door of the sitting-room.

CHAPTER II

THE merry breakfast was proceeding quite unconseious of danger, for no bushrangers had been heard of in the neighbourhood for three years, and Mr Burns had got a little eareless, or he would not have entirely denuded the station of men, even for a few hours. Jane and Gladys had just asked their father to mend a favourite toy which had got broken, when suddenly four men appeared like magic in the veranda, and with a call of "Bail up!" their father was covered by a gun. The two little girls cowered under their mother's skirts, Billy snatched up the poker and went for the man, but was at once stunned by a blow, and then brutally kicked into a corner of the veranda where he lay. Mr Burns, his wife, and Mrs Maekenzie all held up their hands as desired.

"I am going to kill you, Burns," said the leader,

entering the room.

"Why? What harm have I ever done you. I do not think I ever saw you before," said Mr Burns.

"It was some of your family at home who got me transported, and you are going to pay for it."

"How can my husband be responsible for that?"

said Mrs Burns.

"Hold your tongue, woman, or I will put a bullet in that brat of yours as well. When I have

done with that precious husband of yours I am going on to Nangwarry to settle Andrews' hash for him. Now I am going to count ten and then fire. One, two, thr——"

Crack went a pistol in the doorway. The bush-ranger dropped his gun, swayed for a moment, and then collapsed in a heap on the floor. Mr Burns sprang up and seized the gun just as Annie burst into the room, firing two more shots at the men outside, who fled for their horses and galloped off, not even waiting to secure their leader's beautiful mare. At the same moment the thundering sound of many galloping hoofs was heard by the anxious family, and Mrs Mackenzie, running out into the yard, saw their own rounding-up outfit with a dozen other men, and four of the police, tearing down towards the station.

"That way! That way!" she screamed,

pointing after the flying bushrangers.

The whole crowd raced on, except Mackenzie, Stanley, Sam, and one policeman, who was out of his saddle in a moment, and running for the station.

"Are you hurt, Mr Burns? Is-is Annie

safe?" he gasped.

"Quite safe, Pierce, and she shot the leader and saved my life, and Mr Andrews' too, for the man said he was going on to Nangwarry to shoot him as well as myself. Is the bushranger dead?"

"Quite, sir, he is shot through the heart."

"Do you know him, Pierce?"

"No, sir, but Mackie may. I don't think he will get the others, their horses are fresh and our's

have had a long gallop, as well as the whole road from Geelong, where we got word from a man they had held up last week, that there were bush-rangers out. We met and turned the round-up party, just in time to be too late, I fear. I wonder why McCarthney did not warn you yesterday, for Gill had met and warned him. But what has happened to Billy? Poor little beggar! What a head! Let me bandage him, Mrs Burns," as he saw her trying with shaking hands to tie her handkerchief round Billy's cut forehead.

"He went for the bushranger with the poker, Pierce, and the man kieked him. Oh, my poor

Billy, you do look bad."

"I will be all right directly, Mamma, I think, but I have done for your new rug with my head."

"Never mind rugs, or anything, dear boy. Oh, where would we all be now if Annie had not been so brave and prompt, and so good a shot?"

"Stanley, you might help Billy along to his room, and here is the arnica bottle for the bruises.

I will get some linen."

"Come along, Stan, and hand the fainting fly out of the room. Sam, give me your arm too," he added laughing.

But Stanley saw his little brother was in great pain and badly hurt, and lifting him gently in

his arms carried him off to bed.

Mackenzie, Sam, and Pierce removed the body of the bushranger to an out-house, and as several of the worst mounted men were now back they cleaned the room, and Mrs Mackenzie tidied it up, looking anxiously at Annie as she did so, who sat on a chair by the sofa where her father was lying, and who looked very white and half dazed, as if she neither saw nor heard anything. Her lips were blue, and she was gasping for breath. Pierce locked the out-house and put a man on guard at the door, and returned to the sitting-room.

"Try and rouse Annie, Pierce," whispered Mrs Mackenzie. "She is quite dazed-looking."

"How brave and clever you were, Annie. We policemen will be for ever grateful to you. I am sure you saved a lot of our lives, as well as your father's and Mr Andrews'. If we had had to arrest that fellow, some of us would have gone west before we got him, I am very certain. Yes, Stan, old man, do you want me?"

"Come to Billy, Pierce, he fainted right away when I was undressing him; he is one mass of bruises. Mother cannot get him round, come

quick."

Annie sprang up, all her lethargy gone, and ran to Billy's room, where she found Mrs Burns in great distress, trying to revive Billy who was quite unconscious and terribly bruised. Their efforts were at last successful, and by the time Stanley had helped his father into the room, the little fellow was trying to sit up and talk.

"What is it, Billy, old fellow?" said Stanley.

"Old Williams is all alone. They came from his direction, Stan. Perhaps they have killed him."

"It's all right, Billy. Two of the men have gone to him. I don't think they were near his hut; they came more likely by McCarthney's.

Queer he did not let papa know, don't you think so?"

Billy made no reply, and his father sent every one away, hoping he might sleep.

One of the station hands now came to say Sergeant Mackie and some of the men were returning, but evidently their quarry had effected their escape.

Pieree ran to meet him and take his exhausted horse to the stable.

"Got clean off. Darn 'em, Barton!" growled the old man; "but I hear Burns has shot the leader of the gang. That's something anyway."

"Not Burns, but Miss Annie did, and saved her father's life. The fellow was just going to shoot him when she fired, and dropped him, with a bullet right through the heart."

"Well done, little missie! The lass has a fine courage. Let's see him."

Pierce unlocked the shed, and the sergeant raised the sheet which covered the dead bushranger.

"Crackshot! It's Crackshot hissel!! Bless the brave lassie. Miss Annic's done a grand thing for all South Australia, a cruel brute he was. Five good men has he killed forbye the poor Lubra cratur that I ken o'. How many more the Lord only knows. Cooee! Cooee! Here, all of you lads! Come quick! See yon!" shouted the excited old sergeant.

The crowd of returning pursuers, now in the yard and on the road, all ran at his call.

"Miss Burns has shot Craekshot, the very worst bushranger in all Australia," cried old Mackie.

"Brave lassie that she is, he was just going to shoot her fayther, and she got him at one shot. We policeman will sleep sound the night; while Crackshot lived nane o' us kent if we would see the morn, ony day. My, we have got news for Judge Andraes when we sees him."

"I must apologise, Sergeant, for taking on myself to remove the body of the bushranger from the house, but the sight of it was making Miss

Burns quite ill," said Pierce Barton.

"Right you was, lad, but don't tell me the leddie is frettin' for shooting sich a blackguard."

"She is fretting very much, I am afraid, Sergeant; but little Billy is very badly hurt. He went for Crackshot with the poker, and got a terrible erack on the head, as well as being brutally kicked, and nursing him will, I hope, distract her mind from the horror she feels," said Pierce sadly.

"Hoot, toot, you tell Miss Annie from me she

ought to be proud of hersel'."

"She is very glad and thankful to have saved her father's life, but she feels having had to kill

the man, and is looking very ill."

"I'll tell ye what I'll dae, Barton. Burns has a light waggon. Some of you lads put Crackshot in it, and me, Ashton, and Morton will take it down to Nangwarry the nieht to the Judge. It's no' just quite reg'lar, for the body ought to be here when he comes up, but maybe it will ease the poor leddie's mind to be rid of it off the place, and I ken fine Andraes wad hae done it hissel, if he had been here.'

"Oh thank you, Sergeant, that is good of you," said the relieved Pierce.

"You will stay here, Barton, till Judge comes, maybe the morn. Onyway you're in charge of the place till he does come, ye ken."

Old Mackie winked at the other men behind Pierce's back, for they all knew of his devotion to Annie.

"Now then, hustle, lads, and let us get off as soon as possible. I will just gie Burns a call while ye get the waggon out."

"Glad ta see ye safe, Mr Burns, but what for is Miss Annie worretin' hersel over killing yon Crackshot for? Ye maun tell her about the Lubra at Days."

"What was that, Mackie?" said Mr Burns.

"Did ye no' ken? When he shot Mr Day at Boboberry, he killed a pore old female black body who lived in the backyard of the station, for pure devilment he did it. She didna even see wha put the bullet in her back. Na, na, Miss Annie's no to fret over the likes o' him. Weel, good-day to ye, Burns. I hopes yer fut, and wee Billy's back, will soon be better. I like the callant going for Crackshot wi' a poker, I do. Ha, ha, man Burns, it's a grand family ye hae got. Pierce Barton will need to look sharp. All the lads in Australia will be after Miss Annie by the morn, and nae wonder. Now I maun awa."

CHAPTER III

They had a busy day of it at Yomola station with all the visitors, for whom a good midday meal had to be got ready, their tired horses fed and stabled, and arrangements made for the interrupted round-up to take place two days after, when the magistrate, Mr Andrews, would have arrived, as Mr Burns hoped.

Most of the men were lodged in the bachelors' quarters, which all Australian stations in those innless days had for the accommodation of strangers for the sheep shearings, eattle branding and round-ups, and division of straying beasts. Williams, the old shepherd, came up in the evening, in a great way about Billy, whom he was very fond of. He had got the men who went to see if he was safe to remain, while he brought a little Joie he had tamed for Billy for a pet, and which nearly made the latter forget his aches and pains, it was so friendly to him.

When at last Mr and Mrs Burns were alone in their own room, and she was putting fresh dressing

on his foot, Mr Burns said rather sadly:

"Poor Annie, this is the end of her happy girl-hood. She has become a woman, and I fear a rather sad one, you may say in a moment. She will never be our merry light-hearted Annie again. I feel it the more as I blame myself for being so

earcless as to let all the men go to the round-up, but I thought that bushranging was a thing of

the past."

"And so did I," said his wife. "I am equally to blame. I never gave a thought to their existence. It is two years, or more, since we even heard of a hold-up. But do not let us get morbid about it, Jack dear. Annie is much too sensible to let it make her really ill. Her nerves are badly shaken to-day, of course, but she told me she never could feel thankful enough for being able to save you, Jack, and probably Mr Andrews too, who has always been so good to her. Get him to have a talk with her about it all, when he comes. But, Jack dear, I wish you would give Pierce a hint that the loss of Wattle Creek makes no difference in our feelings towards him. I know Annie was worrying a little about it before all this happened. To marry Pierce, and have her own house, and by and by a lot of dear bairnies, will be the best thing for our Annie, and keep her too busy to worry about that horrid wretch."

"You're right, Ellen. I could wish Pierce was not so proud, but still I think the more of him for it. I will say something about it to him, while he is here. But are you not going to bed, my dear?"

"Not just yet. I am not satisfied about Billy. He is so restless, and talking in his sleep; but you must rest, Jack. I hope your poor foot will let you sleep. You were sitting up with Billy all the evening, and I am anxious about it. It is more inflamed to-night, though no so swollen as it was."

"Never mind my foot, my love, it feels much

better. I agree with old Mackie, Ellen, we have a grand family, they take after their mother."

"Their father, you mean. Now stop talking,

do, Jack, and go to sleep."

Annie had a sleepless night, but she firmly made up her mind that, whatever she felt with regard to Crackshot's death, she was not going to worry her parents by looking miserable about it, and when at four o'clock in the morning she relieved her mother's watch, sitting by Billy's side, with his little hot hand in her's, she fell into a sound refreshing sleep, and neither of them woke up till Mr Andrews arrived in time for breakfast.

He was an Edinburgh man, a lawyer by profession, but unable to endure the confinement of an office, he had come when a young man to Australia and started a sheep and cattle station.

Before leaving Edinburgh he had taken a medical and surgical course at the University, and attended the Royal Infirmary for some months' practice.

On his settling at Nangwarry the Government gladly availed themselves of his legal knowledge and made him a magistrate, with the proud title of District Judge of South Australia, at a time when Melbourne was little more than a collection of shanties.

Being a kindly, genial man, the owner of Nangwarry soon became a great favourite at all the stations in his district, where his services in marrying the young people, giving certificates of births, deaths, and marriages, his friendly and tactful intervention in neighbourly squabbles, and readiness to give legal advice in difficulties to all, made him very popular.

With bushrangers and cattle thieves he decidedly was not, but even they admitted that he was just, and with foolish lads who got into trouble he was ever kind, and anxious to help them to a better way of living.

He was much distressed at the Yomola hold-up, for Annie's sake, for he knew her to be a gentle, sensitive girl, and he feared she would suffer, and take shooting the bushranger very much to heart. He had known her all her life, and was very fond of her and all the other young Burns, and he had a great regard for their parents.

Having got through all the legal formalities of the identification and inquest on the death of Crackshot, he only waited for the moon to rise, and started off, with his black boy, Willy, leading a spare horse, as Mr Andrews was a big and heavy man, and he did not want to tire his horse, as he had a great deal of riding to do next day, and duly arrived at Yomola to breakfast.

"Hullo, Burns! Fine doings you are having up here. So my friend Annie has rid Australia of the dreaded Crackshot. I have to thank you, my dear, for saving my life, as well as your father's. Had the bushrangers gone on to Nangwarry they would have eaught me both literally and figuratively napping. I only got home from Melbourne at two o'clock, and at five I was fast asleep in the veranda, not even Willy with me, for I had sent him with a description of my lost black bull to Ballarat, and some more cattle that had gone

amissing, so Craekshot would have potted me easily. I have lost a lot of valuable young cattle lately, Burns, and so seems every station as far as Ballarat. Every man I meet complains of losses."

"Myself among the lot," said Mr Burns. am at least sixty head short, and I cannot make out the eause. McCarthney says he has lost some

too."

"Of all mine I regret the little black bull, he is a son of Bully Boy, and you know I had to shoot the old bull in trying to save poor Pat Moietry, when it tossed him, and I was looking to the young one to recoup me for what was a considerable financial loss. I wish I could clear up the mystery of all those vanished cattle."

"Then speir McCarthney, Judge, he it is wha's got ver black bull. It's gane the same road as

our bonnie heifers did," said Maekenzie.

"So you say, Mackenzie, but I have no legal proof as yet. I would like to stay the night, and join the round-up outfit to-morrow, if you will have me. I might hear or see some clue to it all, Burns."

"Delighted to have you, Andrews. I am very glad to have you, for I am no good with this foot, and the crowd of young fellows for the round-up is increasing every hour. I can't think what they have all come for, some, I know, never had any cattle to lose."

"I can guess," laughed Mr Andrews. "Well. Pierce, my boy, and how are you?"

"Very well, thank you, sir. I have got some

information for you, Judge."

"That's good. Do you know that eoneealed park in the Wattle Creek station, Pierce?"

"Well, sir, and it was about it I wanted to see you. Mackie sent Bolo to reconnoitre, and he got into the place. It was swarming with eattle of every brand in the district, and Bolo recognised your bull, sir, among them. Unfortunately, McCarthney's dogs treed Bolo, and McCarthney was furious, and was going to shoot Bolo; but he said you had sent him to search the country for your black bull. Paddy Snatch said there were no black bulls on his station, and poor Bolo did not dare contradiet him, though he had just seen it. But, Mr Burns, Bolo says McCarthney was one of the drovers my father eaught in the park that time, but let them off, as they told him they were only driving for the man who, they said, told them he had bought the cattle. I know you were very suspicious that it was just a plant, but you know how easy-going dad was. What do you say to that, Mackenzie?"

"Fine I kent Judge wad hac Paddy Snatch sooner or later. But the eheek o' him fair beats me."

"Indeed yes, Maekenzie, but to buy Wattle Creek was a most cunning and elever plan. No one would suspect the owner was a cattle thief, and no one without a warrant could inspect his ground, which, no doubt, is watched day and night. There are far more men on Wattle Creek station than there is honest work for, and that I have always considered a most suspicious circumstance. Paddy Snatch has been robbing the

Colony for five or six years. I hope we have nailed him now, but it is doubtful how far a native's evidence would be taken in court, and we have little to go on except Bolo's, which, while quite convincing to me, and I am sure to all of you, I doubt a jury would reject. Paddy Snatch is a canny chiel, and we must go canny too in dealing with him. Could you find some excuse for us calling at the station, do you think, Burns?" said Mr Andrews.

"I will try and think of something. Perhaps if Annie felt able to go, she might call on Mrs McCarthney in passing. She is a very different sort from her rascally husband and sons. My wife likes her. I will see about it to-night."

"Judge, now you are here, will you speak to Miss Annie, and tell her no' to fret about yon bushranger chap. She is lookin' white and peaket-like still," said Mackenzie.

"Oh, I will soon get over it, Mackenzie," said Annie, "but you see, Mr Andrews, Craekshot was a human being, no matter how bad he was, and—well, I killed him."

"Yes, Annie, and saved many lives by doing so. He was a cruel, bloodthirsty man, not quite in his right mind, I think, most probably. I knew several of the men he wantonly killed. The murder of Mr Day of Boboberry was a most cruel and unprovoked crime, and so was that of the Lubra who kept the pigs at the station. Also, for a man to strike and kick poor, brave little Billy showed a most devilish disposition."

"Oh yes, Mr Andrews, please do not think I am

regretting shooting him. I know I was right to do it, and I will rejoice all my life that I was able to save Papa's life, and perhaps your's too; but what I feel is, he was such a bad man, and I sent him to his account without a chance of repentance. I am responsible, I am afraid, for that."

"You most certainly are not, my dear Annie. He was going to kill your father, and you had no alternative but to shoot him. As to his spiritual chances, neither you, nor I, nor any other human being, have any right to speculate. He is now in far higher hands and there we must leave him. Now let me go to see friend Billy's hurts. He puts me in mind of a robin attacking a hoodic crow, Mackenzie. But I forgot to give you a letter, Annie, from the twelve men, good and true, who formed the jury at the inquest last night. It ought to go a long way in helping to solve your doubts and fears, which I most heartily sympathise with, my dear Annie, I assure you. I was also commissioned to hand to you three other letters."

Billy was, though badly bruised, found to have no serious injuries as his mother had feared, and

was allowed to get up.

"I will tell you what we two lame ducks will do, Billy," said his father; "we will have out the buggy and the four ponies, and go as far as we can and see the fun. The buggy will take us and the food and one other passenger. Are you inclined to ride out, Annie?"

"Yes, Papa, I would like very much to go if you can spare a horse."

"Of course, my dear, ride your own, and Stanley,

you ride mine. I don't fancy any of the strangers

getting him."

Annie went to her room and opened her letters. With a gasp of dismay she ran into the kitchen to her mother.

"Oh, Mother! What shall I do! Three men I never saw, or even heard of, before, have written asking me to marry them, and John Shannon and Henry Grey both asked me to do so this morning. I don't want any of them, though they are all so kind about the bushranger. I do wish they would not all want to marry me."

Mrs Mackenzie laughed heartily. "Poor Annie! Half that erowd out there are on the same errand, Annie. Pierce Barton looks as if he wanted to fight the whole lot of them, but there is your

father calling you."

"Come into the office. I want to speak to you, Annie. There is a man in the sitting-room who wants you to marry him. His name is John Green, he is enormously rich, what they call a Gold King; but he is not a good man, my Annie, and money is not everything, is it, dear child?"

"No indeed, Papa. I have three letters from other men here. Please read them, and oh! will you write and tell them and the other man that I am very grateful for the honour they have done me, but I don't want to marry at all. At least,

not any of them, Papa."

"That's my wise Annie, and I think there is a certain policeman who would be very sad if you did. Is there not, dear? I want you to marry a good man, who will be a kind and faithful

husband to you, and not these sort of fellows, no matter how rich they are. Now I will go and dismiss this Gold King, and write to the other fellows for you, Annie. But you must remember that it is admiration of your brave defence of your old father that is bringing them, and not feel annoyed with them, and, Annie, just treat them all alike with a polite indifference to-morrow, and if any of them are tiresome and importunate come to me or Mr Andrews, Mr Pringle, or any other old friend. Or perhaps, Pierce, but if you do, I fear he will be slaying some of them before the round-up is over," he added, laughing.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning early there was great excitement among the men, when Sam brought up Annie's horse to the veranda steps, and much pushing and jostling to get front places in hopes of being

privileged to mount her.

"I am in two minds about Annie going, Bessie," said Mrs Burns to Mrs Mackenzie, "but she is safest with her father and Stan, and Sam will ride by her side. Mr Burns wants her also to call on Mrs McCarthney for me, as an excuse for their all going by his station to the bush, for if nothing wrong is found, McCarthney cannot take offence if they are only accompanying Annie, but I will be very anxious till she is safe home again. Stanley, you are a man now, keep close by your sister and get Sam to do the same. It is your place to protect her from undesirable men, and there are a lot in that crowd, I may as well tell you, all wanting her to marry them. You have a very pretty and brave sister, Stanley, and it is up to you to protect her when your father cannot ride with her. So see that none of them annoy her. She does not want any of them."

"That I will," said Stanley. "I will break any fellow's head for him who dares to speak to her."

"No! no! Stanley, dear boy, that is not the way to do it. Be very polite to them all, but firmly keep your place beside Annie, and if you and Sam should have to leave her, call up Mr Andrews, Mr Pringle, or some other old friend, or Pierce Barton, but I am afraid of his quarrelling with them."

"Pierce would joyfully shoot the lot of them." Mother, why does he not ask Annie to marry him?"

"Pride and poverty, Stanley, but I think your father managed to give him a hint yesterday. Now here comes Annie in her new riding habit, how nice she looks. Quick! Stan! mount her yourself before there is a riot in the yard. Oh Stanley! be quick!"

Stanley ran forward, and Annie was in the saddle before any of the aspirants for the honour could fight his way out of the struggling crowd. Sam, on pretext of a last examination of the girths of Annie's horse, pushed his great Waler up on the other side, and respect for its reputation for making a very free use of its heels kept every one at a respectful distance. The three young people rode out of the gate, Mr Burns was helped into the large buggy, which also carried an ample lunch for all, the Geelong contingent having with them also provisions for camping for the night. Mr Andrews told Willy to lead his horse, and Billy and he got into the buggy together, and Mr Burns drove off behind all the riders, except Pierce Barton and Mackenzie, who, after shutting the gates of the now well-guarded station, mounted and rode behind together.

"Yon chap they calls the Gold King speired Burns for Miss Annie vesterday, Barton," said

Mackenzie.

"I know he did," growled Pierce. "He is just

rolling in money, the beast!"

"Pierce, lad, what for do ye no' speak out yersel. Annie loves ye, and Burns and the mistress are no wordly folk, they only seek to make Annie happy."

"I am only a policeman, Mackenzie, and-

and---- "

"Be aff till her, lad. See, they have sent Sam an errant, and that auld fule Pringle has gotten Stanley doon to fix his girth, and, see, she's makin' her horse caper, to keep aff yon Green. Haste ye, lad, for ony sakes!"

Pierce rode quickly to the front, where Annie, alarmed at the importunities of the Gold King,

had started her horse kicking.

"Oh, please keep back, Mr Green, my horse cannot bear a strange one beside him," and she cantered off alone.

Pierce galloped after her, and soon came up.

When she saw who was coming, "Don't leave me, Picrce. I am afraid of that horrid man, keep beside me, do."

"Oh, Annie, if I might only keep beside you all my life, and take care of you. If I had had Wattle Creek I would have asked you two years ago to marry me, but now I am only a policeman."

"And I am proud to be a policeman's wife, Pierce. Neither you nor I want a lot of money, do we, dear? Come on! or some of those dreadful men will be after me again. I want neither them, nor their gold bags, only you, Pierce."

Riding on before, planning a rose-coloured future, with a fierce and relentless rearguard, composed of Stanley, Sam, Mackenzie, and kind old Mr Pringle (who had awakened to the situation) prohibiting any one to pass them, Annie and Pierce got first to the station.

"How silent it all is, Pierce. I have not seen so much as a sheep as we came along, and usually McCarthney's dogs come barking and attacking anyone passing a mile down the road."

"I was just thinking so, Annie, we had better stop now till the rest come up. There is something queer about the station. It is deserted I

am sure."

They waited till the buggy came up. The riders had stopped in a shady place to wait till Annie had made her call on Mrs McCarthney.

"Mr Andrews, I doubt McCarthney's made a bunk. The station is deserted except by the smell of petroleum, that's strong enough," said Pierce.

Mr Burns drove the buggy through the open gate up to the door, which was wide open and half

off its hinges.

"Stanley, take Annie away to Mr Pringle. There he is over by the big gum tree. Sam and you also keep beside her. Are your guns ready?"

"Yes, sir," said Sam.

- "Then keep a good look-out. There is something wrong here. Mr Andrews, Mackenzie, and I will go in."

"Oh, let me go, too! Do! Let me,"

cried Billy.

"All right, but keep beside me. Yes, Pierce?"

"It's my duty to go in first, please, Mr Burns."

"Surely, my boy, I had forgotten about your being here."

"I will call McCarthney before I enter his house in the proper legal manner," said Pierce, laughing.

"McCarthney! Hi, McCarthney! Hi, there, McCarthney!"

A hollow echo of "McCarthney" through the

empty house was the only reply.

"In the Queen's name!" said Pierce, as with a loud rap on the open door he entered, with Billy on his heels, a wide empty passage and turned into a large room where there was nothing but a trestle table, piled round with broken-up furniture, rags, dry grass, and paper, the whole steeped in petroleum and half burnt. Evidently a determined effort to fire the house had been made.

"Bad white fellows all gone, white Mary too," remarked Willy, Mr Andrews' inseparable black attendant.

They went through all the rooms, but there was nothing in any of them till they came to what looked like a small bedroom.

"Hullo! Look at that!" cried Billy, pointing to an old coat with scraps cut out of it lying on the floor.

"Weel, laddie? And what about it?" said Mackenzie. "It's a sare ragged auld cloot, and a clarty one forbye."

Billy took a paper parcel out of his pocket, and, opening it, disclosed to his astonished audience a black mask which fitted into a big hole in the

coat; the scraps were the bits cut out for the eyes.

" Preserve us a'!" gasped Mackenzie.

"I did not tell you, Papa, because I was afraid Mr Andrews would have him hung, but just as Annie fired the second time, one of the bushrangers masks fell off, and I recognised Tom McCarthney. My head was all right while I was lying in the veranda, it was when I tried to stand it got so queer. I picked up the mask this morning and was bringing it back to Tom. I was going to give him the parcel, and tell him he had dropped it the last time he was at Yomola; but no one knew except myself. You don't mind, do you, Papa, or you, Mr Andrews? Tom was very kind to me the day Stanley and I got lost. My feet were so sore, and Tom carried me for miles on his back. I wanted to help him and get him away."

"No, Billy, I don't mind the least," said his father, inwardly shuddering at what might have been the affectionate little fellow's fate had McCarthney senior overheard the conversation.

"Tom's a foolish, misguided lad," said Mr Andrews; "but if he ever is caught I will certainly do my best for him, for the sake of our kind mutual friend, Billy."

"I have searched the house, and now I will get some more of the men and search the stables and out-houses," said Pierce; and he went back to where the round-up party were resting, and told them all that had happened.

Annie and Stanley returned to the house with him and his assistants.

"Now, Burns, as you cannot get any further over the road in the buggy in the soft state it is in after all that rain the other day, I propose you and Billy, with Mackenzie and one or two others, remain here, while we go and look for the cattle."

"I will stay with them," said Annie. "I don't feel quite able for a round-up; it is very hot

to-day."

"Do, Annie. I hated the idea of your going with that crowd," said Pierce. "We are after stolen eattle now, and I might have to go on and leave you."

"And so might I," said Mr Andrews. "Yes, Pierce, it is a cattle-thieves hunt this time, I feel sure. Who will stay and who go on? What of

you, Pringle?"

"I stay. Nothing but dire necessity will get me into the saddle again to-day till it is time to go back to Yomola. "Hi there, Bull!" he shouted, as his manager tried to conceal the broad grin that his face, as well as all the other men's, carried at his employer's well-known nautical dislike of the saddle. "Go you and get my stolen cattle, and help Judge to get back your namesake, if you can."

"I will be most 'appy, sir, but I 'ave's no 'ope now of hever seeing hany of the hanimals again, Mr Pringle. I hexpect the thieves 'ave a long start of hus, that black fellow says four days,

if not five, from the 'osses tracks."

"Leave me Bolo, Pierce, if Willy will be enough for you," said Mr Burns. "We might want him."

"Surely, Mr Burns; besides I was just going to

tell him to stay, for he has had a very heavy week of it."

"Billy, lend me your telescope, will you, like a good fellow? One of those Geelong fellows has borrowed mine," said Mr Andrews. "Now who goes, or stays? We must be off."

Two men who had not lost cattle, and who desired to ingratiate themselves with Annie volunteered to stay; so with Mr Pringle, Mackenzie, her father, Bolo the black tracker, and the two Ballarat men, and Billy, she had a sufficient guard.

Annie shook hands with all the Geelong men who were not returning to Yomola, but going on home, and wished them "good luck, and goodbye," and then told her father she would like to see the mask. He saw she wanted to speak to him so limped into the house again.

"Papa, Pierce asked me to marry him, as we were riding here. I said 'yes.'"

"Dear child, I am so glad. There is no man I could see you marry with such confidence in your happiness as Pierce. I noticed his malignant scowls had softened in the last hour; and I just wondered if you had relieved his mind. He actually smiled at the Gold King just now, as he conducted him out of temptation and your vicinity. Poor Pierce, it is trying for him to see his father's old station in the state it is in."

"He never cared much for the place, Papa; he told me, since he was old enough to understand, the perpetual state of increasing debts was a nightmare to him, and he knew it would never be his."

"I will announce your engagement to Pieree, when we all assemble for our lunch. Of course, the Geelong lot will not return to Yomola, so you will be no more troubled with them. I expect our own outfit, with the Ballarat and Penola people, back very soon, for I do not expect they will find a hoof left of all our stolen beasts; they were all sold at Geelong yesterday, Annie. I shall not trouble any more about mine, not even Mackenzie's 'bonnie heifers.' I am most sorry for Andrews, who now will have to buy back his bull if he ever sees or hears of it again, which I don't think he will."

Annie suggested camping under some beautiful gum trees near the gate, for the house was dirty and smelling of petroleum, and there was a good stable for the horses just inside the entrance.

The men backed the buggy under the largest of the trees, so that Mr Burns could sit in it and rest his foot, while the others gathered round on the grass, which was fresh and green after the rains a fortnight before. Bolo lit a fire for the kettle, and they began their meal.

"Pringle," said Mr Burns. "I am very pleased indeed to be able to tell you that Annie is engaged to Pierce Barton."

"I congratulate you, Miss Annie, for if that lucky young dog, Pierce, has got the great prize of Australia, you have chosen a real good fellow in every way. Pierce will make his mark in the Australian constabulary, Burns, for it is bound to become a very large force, with commissioned officers, before many years pass; for lawlessness is increasing, unfortunately, owing to the police force being far too small, and the barracks so far apart; witness what has just occurred with the bushrangers and cattle thieves. I know the Government have been for some time much disturbed about it, and are going to take steps to have the country properly patrolled."

Billy had crept round to Annie's side looking

rather sad.

"You won't leave us, Sissie, will you? Can't Pierce come and live at Yomola too?"

"If I go to live at Penola, Billy, when you go to school you will stay with Pierce and me. You will like that, Billy boy, won't you?"

"How jolly for me. I never thought of that,"

said Billy, quite happy again.

"I wonder what Andrews is going to do about the derelict station. Do you know, Burns?" a man asked.

"Mackenzie, Swinton, and Sam, also Bolo, are to remain in charge. I would fain not leave Mackenzic, but Swinton is young to take charge under the circumstances, and Pierce must report at Penola to-morrow, or he might have stayed."

"I am no' staying after the morrow's morn. It is fair rediculous wi' Burns with a fut like that for me no' to be at Yomola. Swinton will do fine, and so will Sam, without me, and they maun just

manage for-"

"Papa! Papa! there are horses coming," cried Billy, who was lying on the grass, with his ear to the ground, pretending he was a Red Indian.

"And, oh look, how Bolo is tearing along, he is running like mad!"

"What's up, Bolo?" shouted Maekenzie.

"One, two, three, four, five horses come through scrub. Put Missie Annie and little white fellow in stables, big white fellows get their guns ready,"

panted the frightened black boy.

Mr Burns hurried Annie and Billy into the stable and stood at the door, Mackenzie beside him, the rest near by behind a low wall and the buggy. Bolo went up the highest of the gum trees where he was well hidden by a large branch, and they waited for the strangers coming.

"Me and Bessie's for hame tae Auld Reekie, and we will just get a bit kale yard doun Portobello way, Burns. You and the Mistress had better come too, we are ower auld for sich cantrips twice

a week now, I'm thinkin'."

"Perhaps it is a false alarm. I do hope and trust it is, Mackenzie," said Annie. "I do so

dread any more fighting."

"And so it is! Just a scare, Annie. Hear Bolo's delighted shouts of welcome; and he is coming down that tree just like the ring-tailed monkeys Major Andrews told you children about when he spent his long leave from India with his brother at Nangwarry. You remember him, don't you?" said Mr Burns.

"I should think I did. I howled and cried when he went away, and sent my love to him every mail for years."

"I shall have to tell Pierce about that, Miss Annie," said her father, laughing.

"Oh, Pierce knows; he howled if possible even louder than I did. Mamma and Mrs Barton had to make us some toffee to comfort us. I was three and Pierce four. Mrs Barton was staying at Yomola. I think she died soon after she went back to Wattle Creek."

"Who is coming, Bolo?" said Mr Burns.

"Old man Mackie come, and plenty policemen from Penola. No fear bad white fellows now,"

grinned Bolo.

"I say, Mackie, you gave us an awful fright. Pappa had Annie and me tucked away behind the horses, and he stood in the door with his gun, and all the men took cover. Just look, Annie, at Mr Pringle, he was below the buggy. He can't get out! Mackenzie! Come and we will pull him. No, he's managed it."

"Where is yer wee black stick that sees all

things, Billy, as Bolo says?"

"I lent it to Mr Andrews," said Billy proudly.

"Some Geelong fellow had taken his."

"You are very welcome, Mackie," said Mr Burns, "in spite of the scare. I was grudging leaving Mackenzic here in charge. I suppose you have heard something of the doings here, to bring

you up to Wattle Creek?"

"Gill, the man who was held up by the bushrangers last week, met McCarthney again four days ago, and a lot more men with a great mob of cattle off the Geelong road. Now McCarthney had no'but a small bunch o' young beasts, honest, and if he had gotten a mob he stole 'em. Gill says there were fifteen rough-looking earls with him and Mrs McCarthney. I'm wae for the poor woman, that I am. Gill didna like the looks of them, and hid in the scrub till they were by, and it was verra wise, for the least they'd hae done wad hae been to lift his horse from him if they'd a seen him."

"The station is quite empty, and they had tried to burn it," said Mr Burns.

"Come awa' wi' me, and see what wee Billy found," chuckled Mackenzie. "Man, Mackie, them McCarthneys is a rare lot of scoundrels. Do ye ken what that is, Mackie?"

"A mask!" said Mackie.

"Which fellit aff Tam McCarthney's heid when Miss Annie fired her second shot."

"Ma patience! And Burns sae kind till him," said Mackie.

"Aye, and poor wee Billy was no' for telling, for fear Andraes wad hang him, for Tam had been kind to him, and the mannie was grateful. I just hope Tam saw the man Crackshot kick the bairn. It maybe might cure him o' wantin' any mair bushranging. My, Mackie, what a cattle Paddy Snatch has thieved in the last five or six years, some hundred head in this lot I'm thinking, but that yon dour young birkie, Tam, being a bushranger has fair staggered me."

"Maybe Crackshot forced the lad to gang wi' him, Mackenzie. Indeed, I'm pretty sure of it from what Bolo tellit me, for when Bolo was after the three of them he met auld Musket, the Ballarat Police's tracker, and as Bolo was close on their district and fair dead beat, he got Musket

to take up the running, and Musket tracked them to Kilbride Station, where they pitched a tale that they was drovers and out o' a job and wanted to go to the new gold diggin's, and asked Duncan. Ye ken him, Maekenzie?"

"Aye, fine."

"Weel, they asket him to buy their horses, which he did; and good ones they was too, though Duncan did a real risky thing in buying from strangers that way, and I doubt they are stolen, at least the regular bushrangers'. Tam's, most like, was ane o' his fayther's. Weel, Musket found out they was for Connel's, to get the coach next day, so he slipped off there, and saw the whole three arriving on fut; but in the morn only twa of them were on the coach. So Musket went to Connel's inn, and begged a piece off him, and Connel said he was glad Musket had come, for three men, he was gey sure were bushrangers, had been at the inn the night before, but one who was quite young had made off during the night. The others seemed real pleased, as they had got the money for all three horses which they had sold, and the lad was o'er saft for their liking. Connel gied Musket food to tak' wi' him, and bid him go straight to Penola and tell the police, but Musket met Bolo again and telled him, as he was due hame to Ballarat. So I hope Tam will pull up in time, for his mither's sake, poor soul."

"Deed aye," said Mackenzie. "She is English like my wife, and from the same parts, real nice

folk her people are, Bessie tells me."

"Paddy Snatch will need to ship from Australia

after this, I'm thinkin'. Pierce Barton and Miss Annie's gettin' married."

"Hooray! That's good hearin'" said Mackie.
"Pierce is a fine lad! How's Miss Annie?"

"Lookin' mair hersel', and no' sae peaket. She is here with Burns and Billy. Queer, Tam McCarthney's favouring the bairn. Shows there's some good in all folk."

"I aye had a notion Pierce was after Miss Annie, but was ower poor and proud to speir

Burns for her," said Mackie.

"Yer richt. It was masel' up and tellet him no' to be sich a fule," said Mackenzie. Burns and the mistress is no worldly folk, a' they want is to see Miss Annie happy. To ma certain knowledge there's ten or more been askin' her the day. Burns was fair flummoxed wi' them bothering the poor lass, and she wantin' nane but her Pierce. John Green was one o' them."

"Lots o' money, little manners, and less morals there, Mackenzie. Nay fears of Burns giving the likes o' him his bonnie daughter."

"So I'm thinkin'. Weel, Pierce has got a brave and bonnie lass for his wife. Lang life to them baith, says I," said Maekenzie.

CHAPTER V

In the meantime the rounding-up party, having spread themselves across a large range of the scrub, had searched every gully and bit of thick scrub, but not a hoof could be found; by Mr Andrews' orders they were to reassemble about five miles away, at a point he named, and there he and Willy rode to the front to guide them to the creek he wanted particularly to search.

It was one of Nature's surprises, occasionally found in Australia. In the midst of bare level scrub came a sudden dip of about 200 feet, down which a good, broad path had been made by constant traffic. It led into a narrow valley, about a quarter of a mile wide, and quite concealed from what was called, by courtesy, the Geelong Road.

The valley or creek was more than three miles long before it opened out into scrub again, and beautifully wooded, with a lake, and most luxuriant grass, for any scrub there had been carefully cut. It was capable of feeding several hundred head of cattle for a short time.

Exclamations, shouts, and execrations from the rougher men, and expressions of wonder at the scene from the rest, rose on every side, for a broad, brown road had been trampled, as far as the eye could reach, by an evidently large mob of cattle, driven rapidly down the valley.

"Master! Master! berry many horses, bad white fellows ride. One, two, three four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and plenty more; that one, white Mary's horse, light load."

The natives then could not count beyond their ten fingers, but a little questioning elicited the fact that fifteen men and a woman had followed the mob of several hundred stolen cattle, some

four or five days before.

"I cannot bear to think of that poor woman in the midst of a frantic, over-driven mob of wild cattle," said Mr Andrews. "Well, all hope of finding any of our missing ones is gone, that road has been well prepared for months, and goes as far as I can see with Billy Burns' telescope. Have any of you a more powerful glass?"

"Here, sir," said Pierce, "is mine, but it, too, does not show the end. I expect it comes out on the Geelong road, near the township. A lot of people must be implicated in this cattle-thieving. Paddy Snatch could not do it without accomplices. I would like to go on after them, if you would give

me orders to do so, sir?"

"Certainly, Pierce, I will take the responsibility of it. Now, you Geelong men, Pierce Barton is in command of this expedition. You may come up with them, and then a fight is inevitable. If you do, remember there is a woman with them, and try and protect her. Barton will post sentries round the camp to-night for fear they may try to rush you. I expect you all to obey his orders. We Ballarat and Penola folk will go back to Wattle Creek."

"May I have Willy? He is worth ten of those wild chaps who look on the thing as a lark, Mr Andrews," whispered Pierce. "I don't expect we shall see anything of them, but we might, and I don't trust any of them for real sentry duty."

"By all means, keep him as long as you want

him, Pierce."

"Here they are," cried Billy, a couple of hours later, "and they have not got one beast with them. Yes, there is an old brown cow. Oh,

Annie, it's Georgina!"

"So it is," said Annie, and she ran to meet the party. "Oh, Mr Andrews, where did you find my dear old Gena? I am so glad to get her back! We were all so distressed when she disappeared more than a year ago. Thank you all so very much for finding her," and Annie led off the cow to get her a drink at the station well.

The men had been anathematizing a very thin, disreputable old cow that had attached herself to them and refused to be driven away, but Mr Andrews had insisted on bringing her to Wattle Creek, as, if left alone in the scrub the poor old creature would have soon fallen a prey to the dingoes. They were now very glad he had done so, when they saw Annie's joy over her old pet's return.

Bolo was told off to drive her slowly home next day.

"I have some good news for you," said Mr Burns to Stanley and his own men. "Pierce Barton and Annie are engaged. But come and have your tea, we must start soon."

"How have you been getting on, Annie?" said Mr Andrews, as they all sat round the fire.

"We had a terrible fright. Billy was playing Red Indians, and listening with his car on the ground, and he suddenly exclaimed that he heard horses coming, but not from your direction. Papa put us in the stable behind the horses, and everyone got their guns ready. Bolo climbed up that great gum and saw—what do you think, Mr Andrews? Old Mackie and plenty policemen!"

"The anticlimax," laughed Mr Andrews. "I am so glad Mackie is here. That relieves me of the responsibility of having sent Pierce on with the

Geelong people."

"Is Pierce not coming back?" said Annie rather ruefully.

"Do you think me very cruel, Annie, to send him?"

"Oh, no, indeed, I would not be fit to be a policeman's wife if I stood in the way of his duties, Mr Andrews."

"I sent Pierce Barton on with the Geelong fellows, Mackie," said Mr Andrews. "They seem a rather reckless lot, but they stood in great awe of the Judge, and I formally put Pierce in command of the expedition. If they come up with McCarthney's gang there is bound to be a fight, and some fit person had to be in charge. I do not think there is the remotest chance of overtaking the eattle thieves, for Willy says there were fifteen of them, the tracks were four days old, and they had been driving the eattle at a great pace. I am distressed to think Mrs McCarthney is with them.

You do not mind my giving orders to your man? Do you, Mackie?"

"Surely not, Judge. If Pierce had come back here, I would jest a sent him gallopin' after yon Geelong boys. Sorry, Miss Annie, it's real hard on you, I maun say, but it's good for Pierce, for if he nabs McCarthney or hunts him out o' Australia, he will be a marked man wi' the Government, and get his corporal's stripes, maybe very soon. Yes, Mr Andrews, that pore woman is with the rascally gang, for Gill seen her riding behind them."

After resting the horses and having tea, Mr Burns said it was time to move on to Yomola, and the buggy ponies were got out and harnessed. Annie drove home with her father, as one of Mackie's horses had gone lame and the others were tired. He was anxious to have a quite fresh one for a message in case of emergency, and Annie's horse was both good and fresh, so she lent him to Mackie.

Georgina refused to be left behind at Wattle Creek, but taking her station behind the buggy she trotted home in great content. They went slowly both for her and Mr Burns' sake, for his foot had become very painful, and any rough jolt hurt him. Mr Andrews feared it had festered and said he must lie up and have it poulticed for some days.

He rode with Mackenzie behind Georgina, as she seemed very timid until they did so; but quite happy once she found the horses were behind her.

"I never can help laughing," said Mr Andrews, "when I think of Annie and Dick Thompson. It happened when she was a very little girl. The Thompsons stayed for four months at Yomola

when their station was burnt, it was supposed by Myal blacks. You will remember about it, Maekenzie?"

"I heard tell when I came back, but I was awa gettin' marrit on Bessie at the time, Judge."

"Well, Dick Thompson was a very spoilt child, and teased and bullied poor Annie dreadfully."

"Ta young varmint, gin I had been at hame it's a gude skelpin' Master Dick wad a got," said Mackenzie.

"One day, Dick had been indulging to an intolerable amount in his favourite trick of pulling Annie's pigtail till he brought the tears into her eyes, and saying 'little girl's silly.' She complained to her mother. Mrs Burns knew Annie was being bullied very much, and she told her she was very sorry but Dick was their guest, the Thompsons' house was rebuilding, and till it was ready they had no home; so Annie must try and bear with Dick, and Mrs Burns explained the laws of hospitality. Annie listened very attentively, then asked if Diek was their guest outside the house. 'O yes,' Mrs Burns said. 'On the road?' enquired Annie. 'No,' said her mother, 'the road belongs to the Queen, and she allows us all to use it, but it is not our's.' And Mrs Burns wondered what the little woman had in her mind.

"Ten days after news came that the station was ready, and as Mrs Thompson was very anxious to get home, they started next day. By taking down a bit of fencing they could get a short cut home, and so I and another man who was staying at Yomola rode with them and Burns to the place.

To everyone's surprise, Annie requested her father to take her also on his horse, and he, being very pleased at this little politeness on her part to Dick, did so.

"When we got to the road we undid enough fence to let the buggy through, but before it went Annie walked with much dignity out and stood on the road. Then when the Thompsons were through she pointed her finger at Dick, and said, 'Little girls not silly, but little boy, pig!' and retired majestically. It was irresistibly funny, and no one laughed louder at the discomfited Dick than did his father and mother. I think it did him good, for he has turned out so well. His wife is a very nice girl, and so is Ada Thompson."

"Weel done, Annie! I never heard that tale afore. My word, Bessie will enjoy it. I maun tell her the nicht. Aye, Miss Ada is a bonnie lass, and Stanley Burns thinks sae too, I'm hearin'."

The station now came in sight, and Stanley galloped on in front to tell his anxious mother all was right, and that Picree had found his courage at last. Mrs Burns was very much relieved to hear it.

As the riders entered the yard, old Mr Pringle rose in his stirrups and shouted, "Three cheers for Miss Annie and Pierce Barton," which were given with great heartiness.

Mrs Burns laughed as Annie hastily dismounted and got beside her.

"I have been all day receiving notes and suitors, Annie. This will settle them all. My darling, I am so glad, there is no man I would like so much for my son-in-law as dear Pierce. But you must thank them, Annic."

Annie went forward, "Thank you all very much. I wish Pierce could have been here."

"Why! What have you done with him, Annie?" said her mother.

"He had to go on to Geelong. Paddy Snatch has been robbing the whole country, for at least five years, of cattle. He has bolted from Wattle Creek with a mob of several hundred. Papa thinks they were all sold at the Geelong sale yesterday, but oh, Mamma, Tom McCarthney was one of the bushrangers."

"Never! Oh, Annie! How terrible for his mother, poor soul, what a husband and sons. I knew the two eldest were bad lots, but Tom!! And your father had been so kind to him."

"He ran away from home at Connel's. Musket followed them there. I think he must have been horrified at the way Crackshot kicked Billy."

"Well, nice neighbours to have! I am thankful to think they are gone for good. Willy once told me that 'bad white fellow McCarthney beat poor Lubra white Mary.' I thought it very likely he did. Where can she be, Annie?"

"With him. Mr Gill of Victoria station saw her riding behind the mob by herself."

"If they are caught I will ask Papa to have her sent here, and she can live with the Mackenzie's. Bessie knows her people. She is a lady and ran away with McCarthney who was her father's groom. Wear your new white dress for supper, Annie."

"I would rather not. I want to keep it fresh

and clean, in case any clergyman comes this way. Mamma, Pierce and I want a Church wedding if we possibly can.'

"And so would your father and I, Annie. I wonder if Mr Lennie could come over from

Ballarat."

"Or we go to him," said Annie. "But I know he is away for a two month's round in the country at the other side of Ballarat at present. Perhaps when he gets home again he might come here. When Pierce gets here in a day or two we can plan; but I will keep my white dress in case I suddenly wanted it."

"I wonder if by writing to Melbourne I could

get you some white satin, dear?

"Oh no, please don't. White muslin is far more appropriate for a policeman's bride, and Ada Thompson said Dick's wife paid forty-two shillings a yard for white satin at Melbourne. I am going to make Gladys and Jane pink silk drawn bonnets to match their sashes. I have plenty of silk and Ada lent me such a pretty pattern. They have their white frocks, and you are going to lend me your wedding veil; so we are all prepared as far as dress goes. I washed and put fresh lace in my pink dress a few days ago, and I will wear it for supper to-night."

CHAPTER VI

NEXT day the station cleared early of guests, but native runners continued to arrive with letters for some weeks, and before she was done with them all Annie had declined nearly forty offers of marriage.

Mr Burns had sent a message to Mrs Day at Boboberry station with a description of the beautiful horse Crackshot the bushranger was riding, and which several men had said they were sure was the one he stole at the time he shot Mr Day, and Annie received a long letter from Mrs Day thanking her for having saved her son's life; for when Crackshot killed her husband he told her he was coming back again to shoot her son, who fortunately had been absent from the station at the time. She told Anne she had never had a day free from dread of his coming, till the news of Annie's having shot him spread to Boboberry, and she begged Annie to accept of the horse in token of her gratitude for restored peace of mind. The horse's name was Brunette.

"May I have her, Papa? Pierce has a very poor one, and I would love to give him such a beautiful creature."

"Certainly, Annie, Mrs Day evidently wants you to accept of the mare, and they are wealthy

people and can quite afford it; though she is the finest horse I ever saw. Such a mare will be a splendid possession for Pierce. A policeman's life here in Australia often depends on his mount; and I had made up my mind to give the roan to him. His own is not fit for constabulary duty, it is both too old and too slow. But fine horse as the roan is, Brunette is infinitely finer, and Pierce will be the best mounted man that I know of. Brunette is very timid from harsh treatment. I don't think Craekshot actually ill-used her, for she is in too good condition, but a creature who is accustomed to kindness, especially if young like Brunette, takes very ill to being abused and sworn at."

"I noticed," said Annie, "when Mrs Mackenzie gave her some sugar she looked at it for a moment, as if uncertain, and then took it eagerly and asked for more; it was just as if it were a long forgotten treat. Poor Brunette, I am sure she will love Pieree, he is so gentle with his horse."

"I am going to ask Pierce if he will leave old Slowcoach at Yomola for your mother to ride. I know he would like to sell him, if he could get a good home for the old fellow, where he would not be over-worked, and your mother has steadily refused to ride ever since Stanley's horse threw her; and she never gets any change from the station now, unless in the buggy, and that cannot go over the ground everywhere. Slowcoach would earry her anywhere, and never alarm her with 'capers' as Mackenzie calls them."

"That will be nice, Papa. I have been begging Mamma to take up riding again, because we could often meet if she rode down the short cut half way to Penola, and I rode up. We could meet at the waterfall on the Walla Walla burn, and have a picnic together.'

"A delightful plan, my love, but I think Pierce will want to go too, and I know I do. The country, alas, is not safe for solitary riders, especially women. There is some one knocking

at the door, Annie."

Annie went to see who was there, and returned with a station hand named Adams.

"Papa, Adams has brought the crutches he had when his leg was broken, to see if you would like

to try and use them."

"Thank you ever so much, Adams. I know I can, and I was longing to get up. Stay and give me a hand like a good fellow. Where is your mother, Annie?"

"In the kitchen. We are making the cake. Billy will eat all the raisins. I got Stanley to come,

but he at once started on the citron."

"And now I will join the party and eat the almonds, if Adams will take my arm-chair in and a stool for my foot," said Mr Burns, laughing at at Annie's protestations. "I won't use my foot, I promise you, Annie. I went on crutches for four months with a broken leg long ago, and I know how to manage them. It's a perfect godsend, Adams, your thinking of them. Now, Annie, don't you say a word to your mother, till I am up and dressed."

"Oh, Mr Burns, to think of you putting Miss Annie up to the like of that!" said Adams; "but indeed, Miss Annie, if he does not use his foot, he is better up than fretting himself feverish in bed in this hot weather."

Mrs Burns was indeed surprised when her husband entered the kitchen, followed by Adams with the chair, but agreed it was far nicer for him and them all, and started him beating eggs at once.

Annie was stirring the cake, and her right arm

getting tired, she took her left.

"Annie! Annie! What is it, darling?" cried her mother, as, with a sharp exclamation of pain, Annie dropped the spoon and sank gasping into a chair.

"Rheumatics, Mamma, I think. I have felt that pain two or three times the last few days. It's gone now. I am sorry I yelled, and alarmed you, but I think I won't try to stir with my left hand again."

"No, don't, Annie. Is it your arm the pain is in?"

"No, my side," said Annie, "but it is all gone. I am sure it is a muscle. Perhaps I have somehow strained it."

"Let me rub it for you to-night, and, Annie, don't exert yourself at all. Just take it very quietly, dear; if it is a strain that is best for it."

"I expect Pierce in a day or two back from Geelong; it will never do for you to be bad with rheumatism when he comes, Annie," said her father.

"I never feel it unless I am using my left arm, Papa, nor even then if I don't force it."

Mrs Mackenzie and the man Adams went out

together.

"Looks like heart, Mrs Mackenzie, don't it ? "

"Yes, I am afraid so. I was sure Annie's heart was wrong when she shot Crackshot; she got so blue in the lips, and dazed like; but she is young and otherwise strong, Adams, she may get quite right. Don't speak about it. It might just be rheumatism."

Pierce did not appear for more than a week, and Annie had just begun to feel a little anxious when joyful shouts of "Pierce! Pierce!" from the children brought her to the veranda, and she saw him crossing the yard with Gladys and Jane each holding a hand, and Billy running on before to the house, where he captured his unwilling little sisters and left Annie and Pierce alone together.

"Pierce," said Annie, about half-an-hour later, "I have got a present for you, dear, which I am

sure you will like."

"Thank you, dear, what is it? I am very,

very curious to see it."

"Then come with me. It is too big to bring into the house."

Annie went towards the stables, opened the door, and called, "Brunette, here is your new master."

A friendly whinny came in reply.

"She did belong to Mr Day, and the bushranger

stole her. Mrs Day has given her to me, and she

is yours now, Pierce."

"What a splendid gift, Annie. I have always longed to have a really good horse, but my wildest dreams never rose to such a one as Brunette. I don't think there is one to match her in all Australia. I wish I had had her last week. I might have caught Paddy Snatch, instead of frightening him, as I hope I have, out of the country."

"And perhaps got shot yourself, Pierce," said Annie. "No, I am very thankful to think they have escaped. There has been too much killing already here," she added with a sigh. "Now

tell me all you did at Geelong, Pierce!"

"I found out that Paddy Snatch and his sons were the ringleaders of a gang of cattle thieves that have been preying on the Colony for over five years; but so cunningly they could never be caught. The gang is broken up now, but you would never have guessed, Annie, how many apparently harmless drovers were members of the gang. They are said to have escaped on a coasting vessel, where to no one knows. Their usual plan was to rob stations of small bunches of cattle, generally young unbranded ones, and at long distances from where the last theft took place, then spread stories about myal blacks being about, and while the police were searching for them McCarthney and company had herded the animals to Wattle Creek, and then swore they were his, and they managed to take out or alter the brands so ingeniously that a man, though sure the beasts

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were his own property, dared not swear to it. I must be off, Annie, after dinner, and report to Mackie at Penola to-night."

"Then come in and see papa. He wants you very much to let him have Slowcoach for mamma's horse. We are trying to get her to begin riding again for the sake of her health."

CHAPTER VII

Mackenzie went down next day on business to Connel's Inn about some stores that the Melbourne coach was to drop there for Mr Burns, and came home two days after chuckling to himself, but his wife could not get out of him what it was about, neither could Sam.

When they were all at supper together Mrs Burns said: "Now, Mackenzie, I am dying to hear what your adventures were. Do tell us about them."

"It was Pringle's adventure, no' mine, Mrs Burns. He came up on the coach from Melbourne, and he had us a' fair rockin' wi' laughin' at our dinners. Ye ken, when he goes to Melbourne, he spends maist o' his time hangin' about the quay lookin' at the ships. Weel, he saw one just startin', homeward bound, and as he was lookin' he seed Mrs McCarthney in braw, deep widdy's weeds go on board with Tam. Pringle was sure taken aback, and shied speirin' her as ta what had come till her man, but up comes the shipping agent, 'Mistress McCarthney!' cries he, 'it's wae I am to see ye, mam, in them weeds!'

"'Thank ye, Mr Donald,' says she, 'Dan was killed by a bull, same as the former proprietor, very strange, was it not? Me and Tam's going home to my people, but me twa eldest are re-

maining in Australia. I have sold Wattle Creek to the Government,' and awa' she went down ta the cabins. 'Ye've sold it, mam, have ye?' thought Pringle, and then in a moment he tumbled to what was on, and hid hissel behind a pile of lumber. Presently three men got up as sailors came along the quay. Pringle's an auld saut hissel and kens the genuine article when he sees it; them fellows was not. They went on board, and Tam came up from below and spoke to them, pointing to where Pringle had been standin'. The auldest turned round, and Pringle at aince recognised Paddy Snateh. They all went below again, but soon he saw the widdy woman peepin' anxiously up, and not wantin' to fret her, Pringle sneaked round at the back o' the shippin' office and up to the hotel. As it was known he had been lately at Wattle Creek he was feared questions, might be asked him. So he just waited till he seen the ship in full sail, wi' a grand favouring breeze, far out fra the land, and got his horse and rode out to friends for the nicht, and next day took the coach to Connel's."

"Hurrah!" shouted Billy. "I am glad poor old Tom's got off; he was not such a bad sort, now, was he, Stan?"

"He is better out of Australia, at any rate,

Billy, old boy," said Stanley.

"I am so thankful Mrs McCarthney's safe. I did dread her being arrested also," said Mrs Mackenzie, "and I could do nothing for her."

"I told Mackie if she was to bring her here, and Mackenzie and I would be responsible for her. She is a brave woman, and a most faithful wife to that ruffian McCarthney; but I am very glad she has got away home to her own family," said Mr Burns.

"I'm thinking it will be to Ireland McCarthney will be for goin'. England is tae law abidin' for the likes o' him, and there's aye rows goin' on in Ireland," remarked Mackenzie.

Annie said nothing, but it was a great relief to her to know that Pierce would not be exposed to any danger from McCarthney, for she had dreaded the man's cruel, unreasoning Irish revengefulness of character.

Annie made the little sisters' bonnets, and was just finishing a pretty scarf she had embroidered in coloured silks for the adornment of her mother's only black silk gown the following Friday, when Billy burst into the room waving a letter from Mr Andrews.

"Willy's here, and he says, 'One big white fellow Bishop come Monday, and make white Mary Annie all along Lubra white fellow Pierce.'"

"Hand me over that letter, you imp, and run and get your mother," said Mr Burns.

Billy's shouts and cooees brought Mrs Burns and Mrs Mackenzie, Stanley and the Joie, Gladys and Jane.

"Dear Burns," said the letter. "The Bishop arrived unexpectedly this morning, and I told him about Annie and Pierce. He sends his grateful thanks to Annie, as Crackshot had threatened to do for him if he caught him in the scrub; and he will be delighted to marry her and Pierce, whom

we will bring with us on Monday forenoon. The Bishop suggests an evening service in the great shearing shed, and Holy Communion at next morning for all who wish it; wedding at eleven, and we must leave by three on Tuesday afternoon. Rod Martin is to be best man, and Mackie and his wife are coming, and four constables more will take charge of the station, so that all can attend the services with no anxiety about the safety of the place.

"The Bishop hopes to convince Annie that she

need not worry about Crackshot's fate.

"Keep Willy to go for old Williams, as I am sure Annie will want to have him at her wedding. The man I am sending up from Nangwarry is quite to be trusted to look after his sheep, in case your men all want to be at the wedding, which I am sure they will. He is a bit of a sundowner, but, though lazy, not at all a bad fellow. I am bringing all the necessary papers with me. I am so glad the Bishop was available for the marriage, for both Annie and Pierce well deserve the honour.

"Tell Annie Pierce has got his corporal's stripes, and bid her treat him with due respect. Bolo is coming to see Annie 'become Pierce's Lubra.' It seems the old woman that Crackshot killed was his mother, and he is very grateful to Annie.

"I have a lot of news for you when we meet on

Monday."

"What a lucky thing it was we made the cake," said Mrs Mackenzie, "but there is a lot to do yet. Come along, Gladys and Jane. Are you coming too, Billy?"

"I would rather go with Willy to old Williams, if you don't mind, Mrs Mackenzie. He is such fun."

"Ask Swinton to give Willy a horse, and one for the other man, Billy, so that Williams can ride up to the station."

"Willy says, 'white Mary Annie all along good Lubra, kill any bad white fellow meddle Pierce. Wish Willy got Lubra same sort. Ya, ya, no good, plenty frightened bad white fellow, run away, leave Willy die all alone."

"I would like to tell Pierce about the McCarthneys, Mackenzie," said Annie, "but would it be fair to Mr Pringle, as Pierce is a policeman? I suppose he ought not to have let them go?"

"Dinna fash yersel', Miss Annie, about that. Pringle's tellet the whole countryside hissel' by this time. I's warrant Pierce knows the whole story. Government's ower gleg tae be quit o' sich to find fault with the way of their goin'."

CHAPTER VIII

The time till Monday was all too short for the preparations, but by the time the Bishop and Mr Andrews arrived the shearing shed had been turned by the men into a beautifully decorated church, festooned with arches of fern trees, and the lovely eucalyptus or gum-tree flowers, and some curtains kept for the purpose by Mrs Burns.

It was a great joy to those churchless people to have the services. We can have no conception nowadays what it meant for months to go by and not a clergyman of any denomination to pass that way, the only churches being in Melbourne or a few of the larger townships, each man's parish being perhaps some hundred miles square.

During the morning a lady and her husband arrived with a guard of four strong station hands, having ridden eighty miles to bring their little three-year-old baby to be baptised at the evening service. They were made most heartily welcome by the Burns, but it was not looked upon as anything out of the way their coming so far. The churchmanship of those early settlers would make some of our modern clergy's hair stand on end, but they were most earnest and sincere, according to their lights.

When the Bishop crossed over to the shed it

was nearly full, and Willy and Bolo were standing disconsolately at the door, where Swinton stood in charge, refusing to let "them heathens in."

"Oh, please let them in," said the Bishop.

"Do, Swinton," said Annie, who, with her mother, was with him. "I want all my friends also to be there to-morrow too, and Willy and Bolo are old friends."

The two natives gazed wonderingly at the baptism, and there was much talk afterward about how, "White fellow Bishop had made piceaninny white fellow one Christian."

Next morning, after the Communion, the Bishop had a long and eonsoling talk with Annie about the death of Crackshot, and he begged her not to let it prey on her mind, or spoil what promised to be a very happy married life. He said she had done what was just and right, and had saved many good and useful lives, and she was in no way responsible for Crackshot.

At eleven, Annie, in her simple white muslin gown, with her mother's wedding veil and a wreath of the gum-tree flowers, with which her dress was also trimmed, her very lame father leaning on her arm, and her two pretty little bridesmaids behind her, in their white frocks and pink sashes and bonnets, and Mrs Burns, Stanley and Billy behind, all passed between a lane of friends and station hands into the shed Church, where a somewhat shy and red-faced Pierce with the Bishop and his best man, a comrade in the police, called Rod Martin, awaited her.

The rest followed them in, Willy and Bolo among

the very first, and soon Annie and Pierce were man and wife.

Annie was very anxious that all the station hands should be at her wedding breakfast, which really was a quite substantial dinner. So the long trestle table in the bachelor quarters had been brought in to their own sitting-room, and they sat down together at one o'clock. As the bride and bridegroom with their large escort had to leave at three in order to get to Penola before dark, there being no moon at the time, only a few speeches were made, and after Pierce and her health had been drunk, Annie went and changed her dress for her riding habit.

"Now, Annie dear, be sure and see the doctor at Melbourne about your rheumatism. Have you

felt it to-day?" said her mother.

"Just one tiny twinge. It is really nearly gone, but I will see him and get some liniment in case it comes back."

The whole assembly accompanied Annie and Pierce to the gates, leaving Mr and Mrs Burns

together in the veranda.

"Poor Mother," said Mr Burns, as his wife wiped away a furtive tear. "Well, my dear, it is just what we did to your's, only we were worse, for I took you away overseas, and Annie is only gone to Penola. Besides, she will soon be at Wattle Creek, for Mackie is going to take his pension and go home. You know their only daughter is married to a farmer in Dumfriesshire. Ashton will succeed him as senior sergeant at Penola, and Pierce will be given charge at

Wattle Creek. Now what do you think of that, Mother?"

"It will be delightful, Jack. Why, she will be only fourteen miles away by the road, and if you will have a gate made in the fence at the place you active people jump it, Stanley says it is less than ten. But neither Slowcoach nor I are 'for jumpin' as Mackenzie would put it. We are too old folks."

Mr Burns laughed. "You will also have your choice of going by the Geelong and Penola coach, if you prefer it. I hear there is one to run twice a week after next month. I am very thankful we are to be less isolated, for Craekshot's visit and the McCarthney episode has shaken my feeling of security here very much. But, Ellen, the Government have offered to sell me all the land they do not require round Wattle Creek, including the coneealed park, which the men now eall Paddy Snatch's beef tub. And I am going to build a large inn there. I am sure the place will become a holiday resort for Melbourne, Ballarat, and Geelong, and I will put Mackenzie in charge of it. He and Bessie will make an ideal host and hostess. I have been rather anxious about his future, for now Stanley is nearly grown up, there will soon not be work for us all three, besides he is getting old and stout and heavy for riding. He was asking for a gate at Yarra mound just like you. He said two of the best station mounts funked it with him, for he got Stanley to change horses with him, and the one that refused him (with Stanley up) went over like a bird, and Stanley's mount refused also with Mackenzie."

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"Poor Alex, he would feel rather vexed I am afraid, but he and I will use the gate, also Annie. Jack, I am afraid her heart is not right. I hope the Melbourne doctor will be able to cure her, but she must not jump her horse nor gallop hard. I had not the heart to say anything about it to Pierce, he was so radiantly happy, poor fellow."

"Annie had those pains when she was a child, I remember, Ellen, and they have not recurred for years. I am sure it will pass off again. By the bye, Stanley is going over to the Thompsons again next week. I thought he was there just the other

day with Annie?"

"So he was. Ada Thompson is both a very pretty and nice girl. You just ask Stan if he thinks so, Jack."

"Oh, is that it, Ellen," said Mr Burns with a smile, as he took his wife's arm and went slowly to meet his eldest son and the children.

CHAPTER IX

The bride and bridegroom and their large escort of friends, which the danger of bushrangers made necessary, got to Penola late in the evening, and Pierce took Annie to the pretty little four-roomed house he had prepared for her in the Constabulary Barracks enclosure; and at the open door stood good old Mrs Mackie, who received them with open arms.

"Welcome home, dearies. Pierce, yer supper is ready, Annie's only got to dish it. I must awa', and give Jim his. Mrs Ashton has ours

ready too."

"How good of you, Mrs Ashton," said Annie.
"Pierce was just saying he was getting very

hungry."

"It was a real pleasure, Mrs Barton. I have been looking forward so much to your coming. I was in despair when I found the Mackies were going to Wattle Creek, and I thought I was to be the only woman in the barracks, but there is baby roaring—I must run."

After supper Pierce took Annie over the house. She was delighted with her nice little home, which was between the Mackies' and the Ashtons' houses. It was quite different from the station, with its large and many rooms, and both Pierce and Annie were half sorry they had taken their seats on the

Melbourne coach for the following day, and must leave their comfortable homey little house again. But Pierce's leave was short, only three weeks at most, and half a week was already gone, and he was very anxious to show Annie Melbourne and the sea, which she had never seen.

Next morning they were up early, and Annie got breakfast ready for the first time in her own house. Presently Mrs Ashton came in with her baby to see if Annie had all she needed.

Baby was two years old, and a great pet of Pierce's, and they all spent so much time playing with it, they nearly lost the coach. Mackie, Ashton, and Pierce ran over to the inn with the luggage, and Annie when she got there, found quite a crowd waiting, who cheered her, and everyone shook hands with her and Pierce including the jolly old coachman and the guard. Annie was in a perfect maze over their names by the time she was seated on the box seat with the coachman on one side and Pierce on the other.

The novelty of the coach, for Annie had never been on one before, and Pierce's painstaking endeavours to disentangle the identities of the Penola folk, made the time pass quickly for Annie, and she did not notice, as Pierce did with growing annoyance on her account, that every here and there along the road, small groups of people from the neighbouring stations and shepherds' and squatters' huts, were waiting to see Annie. Most of them had a letter, parcel, or message for an excuse for stopping the coach, and all tried to speak to Pierce and to her.

When at last, two hours late, it reached Melbourne and came in sight of the principal inn

a very large crowd had assembled there.

"What a lot of people," said Annie laughing, "I never saw so many together in my life before. Are they all come to get the letters and messages we have been getting on the way?" she asked the coachman.

"A lot of folk always comes, but to-day they have come to see something more interesting than letters or parcels, Mrs Barton," and he waved his white ribbon-bedecked whip to the crowd.

A loud burst of cheering ensued, and Annie in

dismay clung to Pierce.

"Oh, Pierce! what shall we do?"

"Buck up, Annie dear, we must just go through with it, but if we had known this was coming I think we would have stayed at Penola."

The coach drew up, and the landlord helped Annie down; to her great relief a fat good-natured landlady came bustling out, followed by two or three lady visitors at the inn.

They were taken to their room to get ready for dinner, and hoped that the reception was over, and they would be left in peace; but when the dinner-bell rang, and they went downstairs, the hall was lined with people and about fifty sat down with them.

All the evening people called on the unhappy Pierce and Annie, who at last could stand it no longer, and bowed themselves out of the room, upstairs, and into their own room, and thankfully locked the door. They seemed only to have begun to sleep, when, "Oh, Pierce, what's that?" screamed Annie, grasping his arm.

A weird noise under their own brought Pierce with a bound to the windows, where he saw that a party of serenaders, all of them Chinamen, with their native instruments, were singing a song of welcome to Annie.

Pierce swore and seized the water jug. Annie snatehed it from him.

"Oh no! don't, Pierce dear! they mean to be so kind. Wait a minute," and she ran and put on a beautiful Chinese dressing-gown, a wedding gift from Mrs Pringle. 'Now thank them prettily, like a good boy, and I will stand and bow and smile, like Queen Victoria. Perhaps they will go away."

These Chinamen had been robbed of all the gold they had dug in two years of patient toil, by Crackshot, who had also amused himself and his gang by torturing and insulting them, and they were very grateful and desired to do honour to Annie for having delivered them from all fear in future of the tyrannical brute.

The Chinamen warbled on for quite half an hour, and between the caterwauling of the band, and Pierce's sarcastic comments on it, Annie laughed till further sleep was impossible, and finding it was really nearly five, they got up and went outside, but notwithstanding the early hour, soon groups of staring people began to assemble, and they were driven back to their room for refuge from them.

[&]quot;Never mind, dear," said Annie to the raging

Pierce. "That first view of the sea as we came over the rise yesterday would compensate alone for it all. I will never forget it as long as I live. It was glorious beyond expression. After breakfast we will go to the doctor, and get him to say I ought to be quiet. Could we not go to the Pringles? Is it far?"

"Ninety-two miles, dearest, and we have no camping swag with us, or we could easily do it. Perhaps some plan will occur to us later."

The doctor was away for three days they found, and by going down the back of his house they managed to elude their following, and getting on to the quay, found a hidden corner behind a shed, where they sat down to think.

"Must try to do a bunk somehow, Annie," said Pierce.

"Yes, dear, but oh, look how lovely the sea is. We are safe here, and I brought a large packet of jam sandwiches Mother gave us, and a bag of biscuits; we might hide here till tea time, if you don't mind, Pierce."

"And I have got my flask with me. No indeed, Annie, I don't want any dinner, if you don't."

"How nice, we will have a quiet morning together, and there are lots of sandwiches."

They sat there for an hour or two, then heard footsteps coming.

"Caught," said Annie.

"Hang it," growled Pierce savagely.

A man looked out of a window above their heads, and a loud hearty voice shouted, "Well, if that is not Pierce Barton I am a Dutchman,"

"Captain Dunn!" cried Pierce. "Annie, this is Captain Dunn, an old schoolfellow of my father's."

"I did not know you were the lucky man, Pierce."

"How are you, Mrs Barton? And so you two poor hunted lions have had to get into hiding at the back end of the quay. It's too bad, I declare. The landlord told me the crowd was for ever after you. He is very angry."

"Yes, Captain, and my wife is ill with the horrors of the Yomola hold-up, and wants to forget it if possible, and not have the matter thrust on her day and night. It will do away with all the

good of the change."

"Come along with me, young folks. I sail this afternoon and Mrs Dunn is on shore staying with friends. Annic, you and Pierce shall have our quarters, and I will have the mate's. He is on holiday too. You ain't afraid of the sea, are you, Annic? Ye see, I am calling you Annie at once, because I always look on Pierce as a nephew of mine."

"Oh, thank you so much, Captain Dunn. It would be so delightful to go on the sea. I never even saw it till yesterday. Pierce, you would like it, I know."

"Rather, Annie! Many a jolly trip the Captain

has taken me and my dad."

"We must try and do a bunk, as Pierce calls it, without our new friends knowing it, Captain," said Annie.

"Take off your uniform, Pierce, and put on

an old suit. You Annie, the oldest frock ye have, and a shawl over yer head like the foreign woman, and don't trouble to bring coats or wraps. There are quantities of Mrs Dunn's aboard. Ask Mrs Perkins to let ye out into Grey Street by their private door; then scoot for the ship, that's her there on the end of the quay."

Pierce and Annie gladly ran back to the inn, wrote a few notes to people who had invited them to stay or to dine with them, packed what things they needed into Pierce's small portmanteau, and then the landlady, Mrs Perkins, who was very sorry for the persecuted young couple, sent a boy to reconnoitre, and finding the road was pretty clear, most of the people being at dinner, she opened the private door, Pierce shouldered the box, and they went down towards the ship, hoping they had not been recognised.

"Come on, quick! ye are in luck to-day. I dare not sail without the mails, but they have just been put on board an hour earlier than usual," shouted Captain Dunn, as Pierce and Annie came on board. "It has got out somehow that you are going with me, and we haven't a moment to lose."

"Look alive there," he roared, as the delighted erew, who had been taken into the secret, up anchored with great speed just as a large crowd headed by a brass band came on the quay to see Annie off, some actually intending to accompany them on board, but not knowing the anchor was up, they were only in time to see a broad lane of water rapidly widening between the ship and the land, as the sails filled to a nice gentle breeze.

Annie stood smiling and waving her handkerchief, and Pierce in obedience to her orders waved his hat with a triumphant grin.

"This is heavenly, Captain Dunn," said Annie.
"You have made us so happy, thank you very much. We were getting perfectly desperate at the hotel."

"I am real glad, my dear, I found you both. Now I have a lot to do, so just amuse yourselves till cook gets your dinner ready. You must be very hungry by this time. The steward deserted last night, and I have only a young boy to wait on ye, but he is a nice, obliging lad. Here Tommy! Now mind and be very attentive to the lady. And you, Pierce, see that he is! I am glad now the steward went off, for he was a lazy, sulky Radical chap, and no end impudent. I hope some one kicks him properly at the new digging. I never go in for that sort of thing, as you know, Pierce, but I could hardly keep my fingers off him yesterday," saying which he went off laughing into his chart room.

"How lucky we are and how perfectly lovely the view is, Pierce," said Annie, as they lay luxuriously stretched in deck chairs. "No one to pester us. They meant to be very kind, I am sure, but it all grated so on me, and I could have screamed sometimes, 'Oh, let me alone, do!' I want to forget that awful hold-up's horrors."

"My poor Annie, I could scarcely speak civilly to them. It is the horse show week in Melbourne, and a queer lot always come to it. They will be mostly gone when we get back, and now try and forget it all, darling, and we will have the time of our lives. Dunn is a most kind and hospitable fellow. I have enjoyed many a grand sail with him and his wife."

CHAPTER X

Coasting slowly along with rarely more breeze than just enough to keep the ship moving, sometimes quite becalmed for an hour or two, they ealled in at various places, boats coming out on hearing a loud blast on the fog-horn, or the ship sending a boat in; letters, provisions, gunpowder, every conceivable thing was landed, and sometimes it was at a station, sometimes a fisherman's or shepherd's hut, or a small squatter's holding, but if Annie and Pierce went on shore they were eagerly welcomed to tea, or any meal that was going at the time, for the sight of a stranger was an event in their lonely lives, and knowing nothing of the hold-up, Annie was allowed to forget it, playing with the children and chatting with the mothers, and admiring the pigs, lambs, tame Joeys and other pets.

At one place there was a small gold mine, which came down close to the shore, and a quantity of

provisions had to be landed there.

Captain Dunn offered Pierce a gun to take with him, but Pierce brought out, and showed to the surprised and delighted old sailor, a large and handsome revolver, the wedding gift of his fellow policemen, and a great novelty in those early days.

"Why, it is as good as five men, Pierce. None of the thieving sort will want to meet you, but

all the same, don't go far with Annie with you. Just keep this side of the new mine. It will give you a niee five mile walk, and is well guarded. All the men at the old mine are Pringle's own people, and, if rough, are a decent lot of chaps; if you mention old Pringle, they will be most friendly, but the new mine seven miles away is quite different, and they are a rascally crew, the owner about the worst of the lot, and it would not be either safe or pleasant for Annie to go there. Ah, here she comes looking so smart and pretty."

The ship was moored to a little quay, so there was no rowing in in the boat, which Annie did not like very much.

Captain Dunn went on shore with them. As they came to a large shed a man looked out of the door.

"It is Sam Pringle!" cried Annie.

"Miss Burns!" and then seeing Pierce, "I beg your pardon, Barton, I ought to have said Mrs Barton. I only heard to-day. Father told me all the happenings at Yomola, but he did not know the best of all. I congratulate you, Pierce."

"You two go and get your walk, while you can," said Captain Dunn. "I have a lot of business to talk over with Pringle. They will be all right up the river for the next few miles, Sam, won't they? They want a walk."

"Perfectly safe, if they don't go beyond our part, but a lot of rough chaps came back yesterday from Melbourne, and they might show gratitude and admiration too plainly to Mrs Barton, to please Pierce. They told me this morning, when I was up at the New Mine, that he was getting pretty wild already at Melbourne."

"My poor boy," said Annie. "The people were all so kind, but they did worry me, and he was very cross to some of them. Now were you not, Pierce?"

"I nearly took this to them, Sam. See my wedding present from the other constabulary fellows."

"What a splendid weapon. It is the first I

have seen," said Sam Pringle.

"Come to supper on board, and see it, Sam," interrupted Captain Dunn, "and you two go for your scramble up the river. Business first, and there is a lot of cargo to land."

"What lovely flowers, Pierce," said Annie; "what are they?" as, passing through some deserted diggings, a mass of Scottish bluebells growing all about the rocks came in view.

"The bluebells of Scotland, Annie. Let us try and find old Mackenzie some seed for the Yomola garden. I brought him some when I was a boy, but it never came up. It was not ripe, I expect."

Annie gathered a big bunch of the flowers, and after some searching they came on a patch of last year's dried stalks, and got a good handful of seeds nice and ripe. There were many other flowers, both Australian and from home, and Pierce told Annie about old Mr Pringle having been wrecked and finding the gold in the river, and how the men found a packet of home flower seeds among the stores saved from the wreck.

One plant they came upon was ragweed, but such ragweed! Standing six feet in height, the size of a large bush, the climate of Australia had stained it a gorgeous rich gold colour. The hot season was practically over now, the unusual rains of a month before had made everything spring up fresh and green, and Annie ran in delight from one new treasure to the other over the soft grass, and neither she nor Pierce observed a man stealthily following them.

"Your servant, Mrs Barton, my name is Green. My brother John told me about your shooting Crackshot. I will be delighted to show you the mine to-morrow."

Annie turned a frightened face to Pierce just for a moment, then coldly and indifferently said:

"Thank you, Mr Green, very much, but that is impossible. We are leaving to-night, and ought to be turning back now. Good-day, Mr Green," and she started down the valley again.

Pierce said good-evening civilly, and followed her. Green swore at him and advanced a step or two, then with an angry scowl he started off up towards his own mine, bent on revenge.

"I saw a lovely corner with some gum trees," said Annie, "just about half a mile from the shore. We can sit behind them and see anyone coming either way. There are some lovely flowers all round about it, and an old tree trunk to sit on, quite out of sight. I did get a start when that Green man came up, did you hear him coming, Pierce?"

"No, Annie, and from his stealthy movements I

feel inclined to believe that he and his brother are ex-convicts, some of the very last sent out, as the story about them goes. It was a fearful mistake of the Government to send them out to this country, and you, my poor Annie, are one of the people who have to pay for the error. But what a sweet bower for my bonnie bride," he added, as they came to the place Annie was looking for. There they could have a couple of quiet hours' enjoyment of the lovely sea view before darkness set in.

Annie was making happy little plans about their future life, as she was very fond of doing, when Pierce suddenly stood up.

"Come, Annie, we must be going, dear."

"Why, Pierce? It won't be dark for more than half an hour! But is there anything wrong,

darling, you look so worried?"

"Tommy is coming running as hard as he can, and, well, don't be seared, Annie, but Dunn's coming too, in no end of a hurry, with eight of his men. Some drunken serenaders probably wanting to sing my Annie to sleep," he added, with a forced laugh.

He did not tell Annie that Sam Pringle was hastily serving out guns to the men loading the eargo on, and that Captain Dunn and his men were

all armed.

"Bring the lady back to the ship," cried Tommy.

"A crowd of men with a brass band are coming with Green to earry you both off to his house."

Pierce and Annie ran down the hill to Captain Dunn.

"I was afraid when I heard Green had been seen on our mine that he might have persuaded you to go with him, and it would not have been safe at all. He's a bad lot."

"He tried to, but Annie said No most unmistakably, so now he is going to get her by force if he can. What are you going to do, Dunn?"

"Sail at once, as soon as you and Annie are aboard. Don't hurry, Annie, there is plenty of time, my dear. Tommy, come and carry some of Mrs Barton's flowers for her, and put them in Mrs Dunn's big vase with plenty of water. Pringle's got all his things loaded, so we will just go quietly on board and away."

Annie went down to the cabin feeling sick with fright and the danger she quite realised she had just escaped. Was she never to be safe any more? And then, feeling the vessel going, she recovered her courage again, in spite of the drunken yells from the shore, as the band of nearly a hundred half-tipsy men recognised that their quarry had escaped them. The quay was on Pringle's own property, so, as soon as Annie was safe away, Sam soon put them all off it; but not until Green and several others fell over it, and had to be hauled out of the water.

Sam Pringle sighed as he saw the last of them away up the little glen. Three years ago he had asked Annie to be his wife, but she had refused him, as he suspected at the time for Pierce's sake, but he was too good a fellow to indulge in any petty jealousy of Barton, and he quietly closed that chapter of his life, only registering an inward vow

that if ever Pierce or Annie needed his help it was there for them.

"If you are not tired of the sea, Annie," said Captain Dunn, "I would like to go and see my son about two days' sail further round the coast; he has a small horse-breeding station, but all the place belongs to him, and no one will harry ye, poor lass. Bert usually sells his horses at Adelaide, as the competition's too big at Melbourne for small traders. He has his own cattle-ship, so there is a good quay for you, Annie," he added with a hearty laugh, for Annie had become very timid in the boat since she had watched a big shark following close behind, with its wicked eye fixed on her as she declared.

"I should love to go, Captain, if you will have us. As to Pierce, I tell him he ought to have been a sailor."

They stayed two days at the station with Mr and Mrs Dunn, and the eight children were a delight to Annie and Pierce, and they were as sorry as their hosts were when Captain Dunn said he must be off.

The wind returning was again in a favourable quarter, but being a good deal stronger much more progress was made than on the outward journey, and they had got to within a day and a night of Melbourne when a sudden storm got up, the ship began rolling badly, and Annie got very ill.

Tommy was indefatigable in his care and attention, and so was the cook, who in these old-time sailing vessels was also the doctor. The crew being two short, Pierce was busy helping with the sails,

and could only run down to the cabin every hour or two to see how Annie was, which she was very glad of, as she did not want him to know the agony her heart at times caused her; but she knew now, what before she had only suspected, that she was dangerously ill.

"Hurrah! The barometer is rising again, Annie! The storm's over, and Captain Dunn says, as it was a land wind, the sea will be down in no time. So cheer up, dearest. Are you feeling

a little better?"

"Much better, Pierce, only that tiresome muscle is angry, because I was such a bad sailor, and troubles my breathing. I wonder if I would be in the way on deck? Oh, thank you, Captain Dunn," as he had the ventilators turned, "that air is nice, and I can breath all right now. Can I sleep on deck to-night as usual?"

"Certainly, Annie, if you like to. The storm is gone as suddenly as it came, but we shall have dirty weather in about forty-eight hours again, so I am glad you will be on land long before that."

"Pierce, my boy," said Captain Dunn, when they were alone together, "you ought to take Annie straight to the Melbourne doetor. I am sure her heart's all wrong."

"Yes," said Pierce sadly, "I am afraid she has

a very weak heart."

"Don't you worry, my lad, she will get over it all right in time. The cook gave her some digitalis, and she says it acted like magic, and she feels quite brisk again."

Annie did feel much better by the time Melbourne

was reached. They went back in the evening to the inn, without being recognised, and slipped upstairs to their old room. Next morning an order came to Pierce from the Chief Constable to come and see him at his office at eight o'clock.

"Do let me go to the doctor at nine by myself, Pieree, and then we might get the afternoon coach to Connel's Inn. No one knows yet we are back, and I will be quite safe, and I do so want to get home to our dear little house to-morrow. Bolo will have the horses there at Connel's."

Pierce rather reluctantly agreed, and went off. Annie crossed by the side of the square to the doctor's, but several people recognised her. He was in, and examined Annie's heart.

"You have had a very severe shock and strain to an already weak heart, Mrs Barton, and it has done you great injury. May I ask the eause?"

"Certainly," said Annie, "my father was held up by a bushranger. I shot and killed the man."

"Then I am speaking to Miss Annie Burns? I am indeed grieved that your brave act has had such a disastrous effect on your health, but of course in the previous state of your heart it was perhaps inevitable. I would wish you were a little less sensitive about it, Mrs Barton."

"I wish I could see the matter in the light all our kind friends do," said Annie, "but I shudder and shake every time I think of it."

"Try to put it out of your mind as far as possible," said the doctor.

"I will, when we get home, but here the people are at it day and night. I was followed here by

a crowd. Pierce had orders to go to the Chief Constable's office, and as we wanted very much to get the coach to Connel's Inn to-day I came alone to save time. Just look at the crowd under the window, doctor."

The doctor looked and laughed.

"I have a large garden, Mrs Barton, and a ragged hedge in the inn's yard will admit us to the Perkins' private door. We will not meet any of your well-meaning, if unmannerly, friends. I will take you safe to your husband."

"Don't tell him how ill I am," begged Annie, as she gave the doctor his fec. "He will be in

such a way, poor fellow."

"It would not be right for him not to know, but I quite agree this is neither the time nor place to do so. Just wait a few minutes while I write him a few lines for you to give him when you get home, and go to-day if he possibly ean."

Annic was charmed with the doctor's beautiful garden, where he grew most of the medicinal plants he required, and as they went towards the inn, he showed her the digitalis in full bloom.

CHAPTER XI

PIERCE, wondering what he was wanted for, and uneasy about Annie, had gone to the office. The Chief Constable received him with a laugh.

"I sent for you, Barton, to go with me to the Never Never Land after bushrangers, but I find since I did so that you are on your honeymoon, and this is no expedition for married men. I am riding by Connel's Inn to Penola to-night to piek up more men."

"Yes, sir," said Pieree, "I heard you were. Mrs Barton and I are going by the eoach

to-day."

"Then I will defer my talk with you till we get there. What a gallant young lady Mrs Barton is. You will have an escort of ten troopers and myself to-day for her."

"Thank you, sir, she is very far from well, and

I sent her round to the doctor's."

A loud rap came on the door, and, told to enter,

the sergeant hurried in.

"Excuse the interruption, sir, but Barton's wife has been followed by a large and somewhat tipsy crowd to Dr Glen's, and he had better go at once to her; she will be afraid to cross the square, though it is just all friendliness it is not pleasant for a lady."

Pieree snatched out his revolver.

"I won't have my wife done to death by those loafing brutes following her about," he shouted.

"All right, Barton, but put that away. It's a fine little weapon. I will go with you, and we will take her back to the inn. I don't wonder you are getting savage about it."

They went to the doctor's house, where they saw the men dispersing sheepishly before the flourished broom and voluble abuse of Dr Glen's

elderly Irish housekeeper.

"Git out, ye spalpeens! and let the lady be. She's all roight, sir, the doctor's away by the garden with her. Shure it's the boys is beside themselves with the admiration they has got for her, and it's the brave, grand woife ye has got, Pierce Barton."

Hurrying to the inn, they found Annie and the doctor in the private parlour of Mrs Perkins.

"Yes, dear, I am all safe, the doctor brought me back through his lovely garden, but do let us start off by the coach to-day, Pierce."

"What did the doctor say, Annie?"

"He has given me bottles of fine stuff to take, Pierce. Do go over to the store and get me pounds of sweets to eat after it when we get home, and be quick, dear, they are bringing out the horses for the coach already."

The doctor laughed, shook hands with Annie, and walked with Pierce to the door of the store.

"Mrs Barton has a very weak heart, Barton.

I have given her a letter to take home to you for your guidance. I hope the quiet of home will in a measure restore her to her usual health," and

with a kindly good-bye he turned away.

"Poor lad, he does not know what lies before him, but my letter will save him some distress. It will be quite sufficient for the authorities as a certificate. She won't last more than a few weeks now. There's nothing that can be done for her, and she will be happier in her own home than Melbourne Hospital," and he sighed over his helplessness to save the brave woman, who, he knew, was dying on her feet, while coneealing it, with a laugh, from her husband so that he might get home before the blow fell.

The coach with its fine team of horses was ready, when Pierce, with the supply of sweets, returned to fetch Annie. Mrs Perkins came to the door with her, where the Chief Constable was standing. Annie was thankful they were off, for she feared a row if some of the men went too far with their compliments, and she told the Chief Constable so.

"I don't wonder Barton is at the end of his patience with them, poor chap. He has had very great provocation, but I will now prevent anything of that sort. Clear the yard! for the coach!" he shouted.

Ten troopers rode in and pushed the crowd back, and Annie was helped up to the box seat. She and Pierce were the only passengers. Before Pierce could get up beside her a strange young man came up and told the coachman that the

guard was ill and had sent him to take his place.

The coachman seemed very much surprised and unwilling to have him, but suddenly giving in he sent him to the stables to fetch some spare reins he pretended he wanted, and, stooping down, said in a low tone to Pierce:

"Tell your chief to keep his weather eye open. There is some hanky panky here. That guard's a wrong un, I am sure. Have the troop on the alert at corners, especially the Deil's Corner, tell him."

Pierce went over to the Chief Constable who was now mounted, and told him, and then climbed up beside Annie, hoping she had not noticed the rattle of the men's arms being got ready in the general noise and fuss around. The guard got on behind, four constables rode up close behind him, and the rest surrounded the coach, the Chief riding beside the box seat.

"Do look at Pierce, sir," said Annie, "he has got out his beloved little new gun again to admire. I am getting quite jealous of it, really. I believe he would like a robber to appear just to try it."

Annie was amused to see the relieved expression on the men's faces as they thought she was quite unaware of trouble expected; and she exerted herself to ask questions about the views, and laughed and teased Pierce about his "popgun," as she called it.

Some four hours later they came to a place where the road turned sharply round a corner

and down a steep hill into a wooded valley, through which the Yarra Yarra river flowed. Just as the coach rounded the hill the guard blew two loud blasts on the horn.

"What's that for now, ye scoundrel?" roared the coachman angrily.

"I thought we were at Connel's Inn," said the guard.

"No, ye did not," said the coachman, "that was a signal to your friends."

"Those bushes moved, to the right, sir," said

a trooper.

"And I saw a man creeping through them," eried Annie. "Oh, Pierce, they are bushrangers, I know they are!"

Three troopers galloped forward, fired a volley into the trees, dismounted and rushed into the wood, but could find no one, although they searched it well. Then a shout from one who had remained with the coach drew the attention of all to four well-mounted men galloping back towards Melbourne. They were on the other side of a belt of thick scrub, half a mile away.

The men wanted to pursue them, but the Chief Constable pointed out to them that they were on special duty for the Never Never Land expedition, and could not stop to chase Melbourne footpads, as he was sure they were.

The guard was now found to have disappeared, and a strict search failed to reveal his hiding-place, so they all returned to the coach, where they found Pierce and the coachman attending to Annie, whose blue lips and evident suffering

had greatly alarmed her husband. He had given her some of the remedy, and soon she was able

to speak.

"Please drive on, I am all right again, and the air will complete the cure. I felt the heat higher up, but the air in this valley is delicious, coachman," and then turning to Pierce, "Do tell me why they attempted to rob the coach. They surely knew they had not the ghost of a chance with twelve policemen of being successful Pierce!"

"They did not know we were coming, Mrs Barton. It was a most unpleasant surprise for them," said the Chief Constable. "And no doubt one of their agents in desperation formed the plan of getting the guard out of the way, and taking his place to warn them. It was a very smart notion of his. I really think he deserved to escape for being so clever, don't you think so?"

"I am so thankful they all escaped, and there was no fighting; but do you think they have hurt

the poor real guard, sir?" said Annie.

"I don't think they possibly could, Annie," said Pierce. "His father keeps a common lodging-house in the square at Melbourne. I saw the fellow come out of it, and the place was swarming with men."

"I will tell you what I am pretty certain happened, ma'am," said the coachman. "The lad's troubled with his teeth just now, and last week I got a friend to go for him on the coach, and let him have a day off to get six of them out, and last night he was complaining again.

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That chap had told him I was taking him on to let him off to go to the dentist again, and if Ben's teeth were bad he would not stop to ask questions as to whom I had got to take his place, you bet."

CHAPTER XII

At last, about seven in the evening, Connel's Inn was reached, and when he saw the large escort the innkeeper came running out to help Annie down.

"You are most welcome, sir," he said to the Chief Constable. "There are bushrangers about. They were at the inn early this morning, and I was anxious about the coach."

"I seem to have an unfortunate attraction for them, Mr Connel," said Annie. "I hope we are not going to encounter any more. The constabulary chased away three or four at a place the coachman called Deil's Corner, as we came along."

The old coachman now burst into an excited account of the guard, and all that had happened, and then Connel took Annie along a passage where there was a bedroom and a nice little sitting-room quite apart from the rest of the house.

"This is the ladies' corridor, and will be entirely your own, Mrs Barton, while you are here. You and Mr Barton will have your supper privately in

your sitting-room," and he went off.

The relief of being alone and quiet, even for half an hour, made Annie feel much better, and she got up off the sofa and went to the window. There to her joy she saw Bolo sitting stolidly at the door of a small stable.

"Bolo! Bolo! Have you brought the horses?" she called.

"Yes! Yes! Missie Annie, so glad you come. Got white fellow Pierce with you, too! So glad you back. Heard go on sea, very dangerous."

"Bolo, when you can leave Star and Brunette safely, find Mr Barton. I want to go home to-

night. There is a moon late, I think."

"One big moon get up two in morning. Missie come home and eat um breakfast Penola. Bolo so glad see Missie and white fellow Pierce, and Missie Annie. Nice got home."

"Do you really feel able to ride to Penola when

the moon gets up, Annie?" asked Pierce.
"Yes, indeed, dcar, I am all impatience to get home, and will enjoy a lovely moonlight ride with you, Pierce. It will be a grand wind-up of our

lovely holiday."

"That's first-rate, Annie, because the Chief, I know, wants to get on, but he would not say so, in ease you were too tired, and he cannot leave us to come alone as things are with only Bolo. You are not eating much, Annie, but the food is not very inviting here, dear."

"I have been having some more of Mrs Perkins' nice sandwiches, Pierce, and I will finish them before we start. And now I will go and sleep comfortably till it is time to get on my habit."

"I will go and tell them you want to go on. One thing is, we shall have no more footpads. There was one of them still here when we arrived, and he stole a horse from the inn and bolted. Connel's very sick about it, but if he allows perfect strangers to go unwatched into his stables, what else can he expect? anyway the whole fraternity are seared stiff in these parts, for fifteen troopers from Ballarat arrived in Penola yesterday, and here we are, eleven more. Now get a nice sleep, and I will have a nap here presently."

Annie felt very tired when Pierce wakened her; but to get home was her greatest ambition now, and to be as much as possible with Pierce in the little time left to them.

They rode off in a full Australian moon, as light as day, with a soft richness of colouring unknown in this country, and having plenty of time, they rode slowly to enjoy it, and give Annie as little fatigue as possible; she had taken a large dose of the heart mixture, and it did not pain her much, but she was glad indeed when Penola came in sight without further adventures, and she in a few minutes' time had dismounted at her own door, where Mrs Mackie was waiting for them.

"Home again, my Annie? I kent Picree and you wad be for riding out from Connel's in that bonnie moon, but ye are looking no sae weel, Annie. Maybe you are hungry. Come awa' to yer breakfasts, and then, Annie, gang ta bed and get a real good sleep for an hour or so."

"Annie is not at all well, Mrs Mackie" said Pierce. "The strained muscle is very painful and won't let her breathe comfortably, and she got quite faint one time. What a fright I got!"

"I think I will have a good sleep after breakfast. I was too nervous to sleep at Connel's, for there were bushrangers at the Deil's Corner, Mrs

Mackie, and the eleven constables we had with us ehased them away. There was a strange guard on the coach, who was one of them, and blew a loud blast on the horn to warn them. He slipped away while the men were after the others, and there was another at Connel's Inn. He stole a horse from Connel, and escaped while we were at dinner."

"Heaven help this country! If a stop tae sich ongoing is na put soon, decent folk will no' be able to stay in it, Pierce, I am thinkin'."

Annie tried hard to do justice to Mrs Mackie's nice breakfast, but the good woman saw she was past eating, and bidding Pierce and her husband "go on eating," she took Annie into her room, and, after unpacking a few things, got her into hed.

Mrs Mackie had been a nurse in her young days, and was shoeked when she read the Melbourne doctor's prescription, for it was one only given as a last resource in extreme cases of heart, and she eould hardly reply to Pierce, who came to say that he was wanted at the inn to speak to Mr Strong, an explorer, who was going with the expedition. Mrs Mackie was going to give Pierce the Melbourne doctor's letter, but Annie shook her head, so she went and began tidying the room.

"I do feel so lazy, Pierce, and so comfortable."

"Sleep well, darling," he replied, as he took her in his arms and laid her back on the pillows.

A very deep sigh was Annie's only reply.

"What a sigh of blissful content, my Annie," laughed Pierce. "Why, I declare the little woman is fast asleep already, Mrs Mackie," and he crept as quietly as he could out of the room.

Mrs Mackie followed him.

"Jim," said Mrs Mackie, as soon as ever she and her husband were alone, "my heart's sair for that pore lad. Annie's varra ill She canna live moir nor a few days, I doubt. Her mother ought ta be got as soon as we can. Ye maun tell Pierce, I canna dae it, mon."

"It's a sair ending till their bonnie weddin'," said Mackie. "A perfect tragedy. Do ye no' think she may pick up a bit, Mattie, for a while?"

"I seed what Dr Glen had given her, Jim. It's the last resource, and, my, what a strong one, too. It will be kinder now to warn the lad what's comin' till him. She has a letter to him from Glen, but she didna want Pierce to have it the now, I saw. Maybe she will give it him the morn."

"If Bolo's not over tired I will send him, or maybe Musket, as he's cam' up from Ballarat. There's thirty constables going this errand, and time it is summat is done. Bushrangin's killed our bonnie Annie, forbye many anither, baith man and woman."

Mrs Mackie looked in to see how Annie was getting on several times, and she always seemed comfortably asleep, but when Pierce came back about two hours after she put a cup of soup on a little tray and went into the house.

"Let mc carry that for you, Mrs Mackie," said Pierce. "You don't know what a good nurse I am."

Mrs Mackie went up to the bed. What she saw

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there made her glad her back was towards Pierce, and he could not see her face.

"Put the tray on the table, Pierce, it will stand gettin' cauld now, and come and set ye down by Annie in the big chair," she said.

"It would be a sin to waken her; she looks so happy, Mrs Mackie. When will she waken up?"
Mrs Mackie laid both hands on Pierce's shoulders.

"On the resurrection morn, Pierce lad. Our Annie's awa', she has been deid these twa hours or mair."

CHAPTER XIII

At the simple funeral all Penola gathered at the grave, full of pity for Pierce Barton's grief. His stern, sad face and quiet dignity won the respect of all.

As Dr Glen had hoped, his letter to Pierce in which he told him that Annie was dying, had been at once accepted as a certificate of death, but, as in that hot climate the regulations were very strict about burials, there was no time to get any of her own people to attend it, and after Pierce had laid Annie's wedding wreath and bouquet on her coffin, he walked alone behind it, Mrs Mackie, her husband, the Ashtons, and the Chief Constable coming next. He had been untiring in his kindness and consideration to Pierce, for whom he had taken a great fancy, as well as to Annie herself on the journey up from Melbourne. Bolo had run as he never ran before, toward Yomola, and when within sight and sound of the station, filled the air with the customary wild cries and lamentations of mourning natives, which told the horrified station hands that something had happened to the young couple, and, not knowing Annie was ill, it was a great shock. But to her father and mother and the Mackenzies it was a secret dread fulfilled, after the attack of heart in the Yomola kitchen.

Mrs Burns and her husband, with Stanley and Mackenzie, started off at once, while Sam did his best to look after things, and Mrs Mackenzie stayed with the puzzled and frightened little girls and the heart-broken Billy, and it was long before the united efforts of the warm-hearted station hands could bring the smile back again to his little white face.

When Musket got to Nangwarry Mr Andrews was deeply grieved, but not altogether surprised, and finding it would be impossible to get in time to Penola for the funeral, he rode up slowly towards Yomola to meet the Burns, and accompanied them down to see Pierce and help him in any way he could.

On the early part of the evening the day after Annie's funeral Pierce was sitting alone in his house, thinking sadly of his shattered world, when a knock came on the door, and Mrs Burns entered.

"Oh, Mother! how good of you to come to me, but where are you staying?"

"At the inn, dear. Father, Stanley, Mr Andrews and Mackenzie are all there."

"You must come here. I would like so much to have you. There is Annie's room all ready. Have you been to the grave yet?"

"Yes, we all went together, but I would like to go again just now, alone with you, Pierce. See, I have all Annie's favourite flowers from the Yomola garden."

Pierce and Mrs Burns went and put the flowers on the grave, and sat down on the bank beside it, and after a long silence Mrs Burns said: "Pierce, dear, our darling Annie was a victim of the lawlessness of the country. Set before you the task of making it a better and safer land for all of us women to live in. When Annie and Stanley were children, twice we were attacked by bushrangers, and I did not know if father would be shot before my eyes. I have spent nights of sleepless anxiety about him, and if Annie had not shot Crackshot this last hold-up, father would undoubtedly have been murdered. It has cost our Annie her life, and you your happiness, my poor boy, but you have the aim always to live for, of putting down this bushranging. Go, Pierce, to-night with this Never Never Land expedition. You will be much better with them than here in Penola with everyone and everything bringing your sorrow to mind, and the Chief Constable wants you badly. You have been there before and know the place. They expect to be away nine months or a year, and, oh, I trust will be able to root out the gang. Father and I will stay at Penola till the stone is up. All Penola wants to join in doing it, so let them, Pierce, and do take care of yourself, my dear son."

"Thank you, Mother, I will go. I was longing to do so, for I felt I could not bear my life here just now without Annie. I see the men are mounting already. I will get Brunette and join them. Good-bye, Mother."

Mrs Burns watched him mount Brunette and ride over to the Chief Constable and speak to

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him, then join the large troop of thirty horsemen, and they soon disappeared among the trees in the gathering darkness. Then slowly and sadly she returned to the little deserted house.

PART III

THE BUSHRANGERS ON THE COACH, THE SHEEP-SHEARING, AND THE END

CHAPTER I

"I Do wonder, McLean, what can have become of these seeds?" said Mr Andrews of Nangwarry station to his manager. "I have had them out from the same firm at home for the last twentyfive years, and they have never failed me before. Now, unless they are lying at Melbourne, goodbye to any garden for this year, I very much fear."

"Perhaps Mr Burns may bring them out, or have heard something about them, Andrews. I am hoping very much he will come back this way to-night, and not go by Penola, for I was over there when you were away, and I got news at last of Pierce Barton's safety from a Geelong fellow, who said it was rumoured in Geelong that the expedition was coming back now after nearly two years. It is said they have broken up the bush-rangers' laager in the Never Never Land, but at a heavy cost in men. Charlie Smith himself had seen nine of the police lying in the Geelong Hospital with wounds and sickness of various sorts, and he said of the original thirty-one troopers he did not think more than a dozen can have survived.

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Happily Pierce Barton seems to be all right, poor fellow, for a list of provisions required by the force was signed Sergeant P. Barton. Charlie Smith saw it at his father's store, so Pierce has done well to get promotion so soon."

"It is grand to think that hornet's nest is smoked out at last, McLean, but there are bound to be isolated eases of small parties, who have eseaped, attacking stations and people for a time.

Was Burns here, did you say?"

"Yes. He and Billy. He told me he had had all that bit of scrub cut down except the large tree under which the two children who died, that came between Stanley and Billy, are buried. Both you and Pieree Barton had advised him to do so. Indeed, Pierce had been anxious for him to do it when he was at Yomola, after the McCarthney affair, before his marriage with Annie Burns. Billy had been making grand bonfires of scrub. I thought him looking much better. He is very pleased to go to Melbourne to school. It seems the little chap dreaded going to Penola, as of course he would have lived with Pierce and Annie, if she had not died, and to be there alone with strangers was distressing to the poor ehild."

"But about your seeds, Andrews? What are you to do? It will be hard lines not to be able to have any garden this year if they do not turn up."

"I will wait now and see if Burns has heard anything about them, and then go down to Melbourne myself and see if they are there. Now here comes

Willy wanting to say something—well, Willy, what is it?"

"White fellow Burns riding through scrub, master, me see him up hill, think um coming here soon."

"That's right, Willy, I want you to run to Yomola to-night, to tell them Pierce Barton is safe and the expedition coming back."

"Oh, master! Willy so glad! See white fellow Pierce and Bolo soon again. Shall Willy go on Wattle Creek, tell old white fellow Mackie too?"

"Do, Willy, Mrs Mackie will be so glad to hear about him."

"Willy afraid white fellow Pierce go die too when white Mary Annie die, but him feel better when um go kill bushrangers in Never Never Land. Willy hope kill um all very bad white fellows."

Mr Andrews smiled, and went to the gates to meet his old friend.

"We were so afraid you might have gone by Penola, Burns, and McLean has news of Pierce, he is all safe. Charlie Smith, the Geelong storekeeper's son, told him."

"Yes, thank you, Andrews, I met Smith in Melbourne myself, just before I left."

"May I ask for Willy to run up to Yomola to-night, my old bones are aching so with being so long in the saddle, I do not feel able to go on myself. The coach lost a wheel about twenty miles out from Melbourne, and I had to borrow one of the horses, and a precious rough goer he was, and ride to Connel's."

"I say, Burns! My dear fellow, how very tired you must be. Willy is just wild to be off with the good news, write your note to Mrs Burns and he will go now. I could do it for you, but she might faney you were ill."

Mr Burns wrote a hasty note, and the very impatient Willy raced away in great delight at the

thought of soon seeing Bolo.

"There are two large parcels of seeds in the quay shed at Melbourne, with no address on either of them. The elerk is sure one of them is your annual parcel, but which is the rub, for there are no invoices for either of them, or I could have brought yours with me had I known the one to take," said Mr Burns.

"I am very glad to hear they had not forgotten me as I feared. Thank you, Burns. I will go down one day this week and reseue mine."

"How is friend Billy boy? Why, he is over

twelve now, Burns."

"He is much better, Andrews, and Glen thinks his heart is all right if somewhat weak. Glen was so kind, and is going to give the boy a look over oceasionally, and report, while he is at school, but I got a bad fright when I took Billy to Penola about three months ago. He was nowhere to be found the first night at the inn. He was very tired when we got there, and I thought he had gone to bed. Just as I was going out of the door to look for him, Bill Thempson, who was at Penola also, came up in a great way, earrying Billy, whom he had found in a faint on Annie's grave."

"Poor little chap! What did the doctor say to that?" asked Mr Andrews.

"That it was over-fatigue, and what he called mental distress, but I was very glad to get him safe home to his mother again. I saw he could not be sent alone to school, there, at any rate. Then the Thompsons came up to Yomola and asked to have him, to go home with them for a change. He did; stayed two months, and came home quite rosy, and his old happy self again,

after romping with Bill's boys."

"I had got the prospectus of the Melbourne New High School while he was away, and found he was very anxious to go, as both Bobby and Dan Thompson were going. He is a queer little beggar, Billy, he brought home with him from the Vineyards a great big book, which he was always studying. I took a look at it one day, to see what it was, and found it was a treatise on fruit-growing and the diseases of fruit trees. I asked him if he would like to have a fruit farm at Wattle Creek when he is old enough. It is splendid land for fruit-growing there. He said he would like it very much, later on, but there was something else he must do first. Mother and I wondered what this duty was, but did not like to ask the boy. Sam Mackenzie, who is his great friend and confidant, told me Billy is going to enlist in the constabulary whenever he is seventeen, which is the youngest they will take, and help Pierce to put down the bushranging, for Annie's sake, and he certainly shall, if he wishes; the state the colony is in with those scoundrels is deplorable, Andrews."

"Indeed, it is, but I begin to see a little daylight through the trouble now, Burns, since their laager in the Never Never Land has been broken up."

"How are you getting on at Yomola?"

"We just live in a state of siege. I run no risks, as you may well imagine, Andrews, after my poor Annie's fate; even old Williams is never without two men with him now. The dogs you gave me are a great help, but Mrs Burns, unfortunately, is much afraid of them, though really the poor beasts just worship her, she is so good to them, but I see she is very uneasy if Jane and Gladys are, what she thinks, too friendly with them. The two little girls are both learning to be capital shots, and say they are going to defend me and mamma, as Annie did. I sincerely hope they will never get the chance of doing so, Andrews."

"What a number of men who knew Annie have enlisted. Did you hear that Sam Pringle mounted his horse and followed the expedition to the Never Never Land on the very day he heard of Annie's

death?"

"No, Burns, I did not. That was a most surprising thing for Sam to do. I thought he was quite wedded to the mine. I wonder why he did so?"

"He asked Annie to marry him when she was just eighteen, but she refused him for Pierce's sake, and I suppose it was horror at her sad fate that sent him to avenge her and put the bush-ranging down."

"Poor chap," said Andrews; "but he will be

a congenial friend for Pierce, they are both carnest, hard-working fellows."

"Now we have finished supper, Andrews, I am going to turn in. I am getting old, and am very tired, I am sixty to-day. I could have got home yesterday, but we avoid birthdays at Yomola now. Annie loved them and always had some grand secrets for them, they bring things back again too much now."

"Poor ehap, stay another day or two and get properly rested, Stanley will look after everything

for you."
"Thank you, Andrews, I will. Yes, Stanley is turning out a first-rate business man. It does seem so strange now to see him a married man at twenty-two, and we all somewhat dependent on him, when you remember the wild irresponsible boy he was. Ada also is a dear girl, she is so good to my wife, and won't let her exert herself at all. We miss the Mackenzies very much; but he has got the Wattle Creek Inn, or Hotel I am told to eall it, into a quite habitable state, and Bessie was to join him yesterday, and start the visitors to-day. That Geelong road is being splendidly kept, and is passable now for the coach in any weather."

"What of Sam Mackenzie?" said Mr Andrews.

"I am glad to say he remains with us as manager in his father's room; of course he is rather young for the position, but that is mending every day. Now, good-night, Andrews."

CHAPTER II

WILLY, after leaving the letter at Yomola, and being well fed and rested, went leisurely on through the scrub towards Wattle Creek. Suddenly he heard far away in the neighbourhood of the old station, now the constabulary barracks, the sound of a gun, which his sharp native ears at once told him was a rifle shot, then he heard a volley fired, which was at once evidently returned. Willy tore through the scrub to where he knew the fight was taking place, getting ready his native weapons as he ran, for blacks were not allowed to carry guns unless accompanied by white men.

Slipping quickly and silently forward, he arrived just as the leader of eight men, evidently bush-rangers, fired at and wounded old Mackie, who fell from his horse. Instantly Willy's boomerang whistled through the air and the leader also fell. Another man beside him yelled to the rest that some natives were attacking them in the rear; and five who were still mounted, galloped off into the scrub as fast as their horses could go, while the four policemen dismounted and gathered in great distress round old Mackie, whom Willy was now supporting in his arms. One glance at his wound told them Mackie had fought his last fight.

One young bushranger, who seemed badly hurt, lay on the ground, another was dead, and Willy's

unerring boomerang had killed the leader instantaneously.

The sorrowful party returned slowly to Wattle Creek, while Willy ran on before and told Mrs Mackie her husband was badly wounded, which prepared the poor old lady for what was coming.

Mackie was still alive when carried into their room, and after attending to him she went to the room where the bushranger lay, and washed and rebandaged his wound. He deelared he was shot through the lungs and was dying, and after she had given him a drink, begged her to leave him alone.

Mrs Mackie having been a nurse, did not think the wound more than a superficial one, but was too broken-hearted to suspect anything, and hurried back to her dying husband.

Willy, on being told Pierce was already at Geelong, offered to run on at once and get help from there, and tell Mackenzie what had happened, as the firing had apparently not been heard at the hotel.

Mackie, with the four young policemen he was training, had just been out for a practice round when they were suddenly fired on from a bit of thick scrub, and old Mackie told Mackenzie when he and his wife arrived, that he was very pleased at the prompt and steady fire they at once returned, getting two of the bushrangers, but as they were outnumbered it was doubtful how the fight would have gone after he was wounded, if Willy's boomerang had not killed the leader. Mrs Mackenzie went at once to the room where the wounded bushranger lay, to attend to him. She found the door locked, and went to the senior

policeman and asked for the key.

"You must have gone to the wrong room, Mrs Mackenzie, none of us surely would lock a dying man in by himself, and least of all Mrs Mackie, she was the last there. But I know the room, I will go with you and show you the right one."

The door was locked, and when the man forced the lock they found that the key was gone, the best suit of mufti, with a month's pay, and the watch of the unlucky policeman whose room it

was, and the bushranger also was gone.

Mrs Mackenzie and the constable stood staring in great dismay at each other for a minute, then

he laughed.

"Sharp chap that; well, I am not altogether sorry, for he was just a young fellow, and I think he was as anxious to get away from the gang as he was from us, for he could more easily have escaped with them than from here. Don't tell Mrs Mackie. She would be vexed for her husband's sake, and I think he is sinking fast now, Mrs Mackenzie."

They returned to the others, who had all left the Maekies' room, that Mrs Maekie might be alone with her husband till the end, which came very soon.

The Mackies had taken charge at Wattle Creek with the intention of only being a few weeks there, as he had applied for, and been promised, his pension.

They were expecting a letter from their daughter

and only child, who was married to a farmer in the Scottish borders, to whom Mrs Mackie had written about their going home.

No letter came, and they twice wrote again.

At last a letter from the local post office, returning all theirs, arrived, the kindly postmistress telling the poor old couple that their daughter was dead; the son-in-law had, three weeks after her death, married a woman who had been the cause of much unhappiness to her, and sold the farm, going no one knew where, but it was suspected to America.

Mackie had lent all his savings to this rascally son-in-law, and had nothing but his pension to live on, and there was no provision for Mrs Mackie at all.

Mackie went and told Mr Andrews of his troubles, who saw the chief of police at Melbourne, and asked that the old sergeant might be allowed to withdraw his resignation. This the chief was only too glad for him to do. They badly needed all the experienced men they could get, and Mackie was promised that when he found the work at Wattle Creek beyond his strength, other work would be found for him.

And now he had died in harness, as he always wished to do, and in spite of her own desolation his wife was glad it was so.

CHAPTER III

PIERCE Barton had just finished breakfast in the Geelong Hotel, when, with a hurried knock on the door, a young policeman rushed excitedly into the room.

"What's up, man?" asked Pierce.

"Mr Andrews' black runner, Willy, has just come in with news of a big fight at Wattle Creck. I fear Sergeant Mackie is badly wounded. Willy begs that you will go on at once with all the men you can get."

"Willy! Willy! What has happened?"

shouted Pierce, running out into the street.

Willy and Bolo were greeting each other with all the native ceremonials of joy and hurried to meet him,

"Come quick, plenty bad white fellow at Wattle Creek, they shoot old white fellow Mackie, me 'fraid um die very soon; they go on Yomola shoot young white fellow Stanley, you go catch um."

"To horse! To horse!" roared Pierce, mounting Brunette. "Who will lend the black tracker

a horse?"

"There you are, Willy," said a man in the crowd round, dismounting from his. "Leave him at Yomola till I send for him in a day or two."

"Can't we go by the serub, Willy? It is much shorter."

"No can go by scrub, him very soft to-day, and wet; nice road go much quicker on it."

"Tell me all about it, Willy."

"Me come message to Yomola for white fellow Burns, him very tired, stay at Nangwarry. Coach lost um wheel near Melbourne, old Burns um ride all the way Nangwarry, him hear you safe from white fellow Charlie Smith. Willy so glad; run on to Wattle Creek to tell old Mackie, um hear big fight in scrub, and see bushranger shoot white fellow Mackie. Willy kill bad white fellow with um boomerang, all other bad white fellow run away."

"Well done, Willy! But is Mackie badly

hurt?"

Willy shook his head. "He go die very soon, think um dead now. Willy very sorry for poor old white Mary, and Bolo, he cry very much; can me go and comfort him, he bery sad for good old white fellow Mackie?"

"Yes, do go and talk to him, Willy. I carnestly hope we may find Mackie still alive," said Pierce.

But long before the troop reached Wattle Creek the brave old Sergeant was gone, and his widow was wondering how she could at her age earn her living.

After seeing that Yomola was safe, Pierce borrowed their buggy and took Mrs Mackie home with him to the little house he had prepared for Annie, and settled Grannie, as he always called her, down as his housekeeper, where she gradually recovered her old cheery ways, earing for Pierce's comfort, and looking after his house and keeping

"all Annie's things," as she ealled them, in beautiful order.

The necessity of trying to cheer Mrs Mackie up bridged over the first dreaded homecoming for Pierce, and when his duties permitted, they were very happy together in the little house, but the new regulations came in, and Penola was divided soon after from Melbourne under a chief constable of its own, who was Ashton; but his bad health kept Pierce very busy, trying to help him, and three years after, when he died, Pierce succeeded him as chief.

Mrs Ashton removed with her two children to Melbourne, where, being a well-educated woman, she set up a girls' school, Jane and Gladys Burns being her first pupils.

Mr Burns remained at Nangwarry till after the time Willy was expected to be back, but he did not return, and being now always rather anxious about

his family, he rode home.

Mr Andrews, having business to attend to in Penola, rode over there, and leaving orders for his horse to be sent to Connel's Inn, to wait there for his coming back, took the Penola coach to Melbourne, which he found in great excitement over the fight at Wattle Creek.

Mr Andrews was very uneasy about Willy and much grieved at the death of Sergeant Mackie, who was well known and respected from one end of the colony to the other.

He got his lost parcel of seeds and returned as

soon as he could to Nangwarry.

He was the only passenger on the coach to

Connel's Inn, and the coachman was full of stories of bushrangers, and told him about Pierce and Annie's drive on the coach.

"I knew she would die of that heart, sir, but never dreamed it could be so soon; poor Barton, but her death has been a gain to us all, for he is a very elever fellow, and he won't rest till he has cleared these parts of those scoundrels."

"Coachman! I see four men waiting for us

about a mile away," said the guard.

"Goodness me! and so there are, and there is no place they can have come from but the scrub. Mr Andrews, I doubt this may be a serious job for us, they are bushrangers, sure as a gun."

"Ben, you go behind and get right down as low

as ye can, keep yer head down."
"And, Ben," said Mr Andrews, "if they try on any nonsense, never mind me, shoot at once, and fire first if you can, my boy."

"Same here," said the coachman, "keep yer

head, lad, shoot the leader first if possible."

Ben Jones disappeared into a sort of luggage boot, the coachman drove quietly and steadily on to where the men were waiting.

They came forward to meet the coach, and seemed

only bent on getting a lift.

"Can we have seats as far as Connel's Inn?" shouted the leader.

"Yes," said the coachman, "going any further?"

"No, we are drovers going for eattle to Kallgarry station. It is near Connel's Inn, I understand."

"Twelve miles through the bush," said Mr Andrews.

"All right," said the man, and the four began

scrambling up on to the coach.

The leader was evidently an Englishman, two of them unmistakably Irish, the fourth was a thin, sickly, miserable-looking boy about sixteen or seventeen, and Mr Andrews' kind heart ached to see him in such company, for the others had exconvicts written all over their sly, seewling faces.

"Look alive there, you parrich fed Scottie," said one of them, giving the boy a rough shove which nearly threw him off the coach again.

Mr Andrews just caught the lad, who seemed very tired, in time, and put him between himself and the coachman. The leader crossed to the other side, and the two Irishmen took the seat behind. They all seemed in very bad humour.

"Where is yer guard?" demanded the leader. The coachman glanced carelessly behind.

"Gone inside, I reckon, he's got the toothache again and we have no passengers, except this man here and yerselves. Ben's regular tormented with his teeth." Then in grumbling tones, "The company won't make their fortunes out of the coach at this rate, with neither parcels nor letters, just one little box of fallals for the ladies at Yomola, and that parcel of seeds for his garden yon man's bringing. It's terrible times, folks is afraid to travel or risk their goods on account of they bushrangers, just now. Are you drovers finding it affect you at all?" he added, turning round and addressing the Irishmen.

"Don't know," said the oldest man awkwardly, with a glance at the leader; then with an oath,

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"Look at that parrich fed lad snoring there, kick him up, O'Rook."

The other did so, and the boy, with a startled cry of pain, sat up and feebly remonstrated with his tormentors, who swore at, and one hit him.

"See here, let the lad be! I am a parrich fed lad mysel', and I will put any man off the coach who bullies him again," said Mr Andrews quietly, showing a Herculean arm as he rolled up his shirt sleeves.

"Shut up, O'Rook, don't be for ever making rows," said the leader, angrily giving the men a warning look.

Mr Andrews and the coachman tried to make a little polite conversation, but failed. However, Mr Andrews caught the leader staring hard at him, when he at last pretended to be sleeping, and he felt the man knew him. Then it suddenly dawned on him that this man was one of two bushrangers who had been caught and brought before him, but who made their escape the same night through the agency of a boy clerk employed in the prison office; and he then recognised the lad, but so very changed from the sharp, pert young fellow he had been then, just a few months before, that at first he had not known him.

To have shown any sign of recognition would have been fatal both to himself and the coachman, so he just continued a pretence of sleeping till the coach drew up at Connel's Inn, and the three bushrangers scrambled down and rushed into the bar.

Mr Andrews stopped behind to get his precious

parcel of seeds, and also the little one for Mrs Burns from the Melbourne store, and the boy quietly waited on pretext of helping him.

"Get out of this as fast as you can, Mr Andrews, they know you," he whispered, "or they will kill

you," and bolted into the inn.

Coolness and a little bluff Mr Andrews felt was his only chance. He contrived to catch Connel's eye for a moment, and saw the innkeeper suspected who his guests were.

With a show of geniality Mr Andrews went up to the bar and "shouted," which was the term then used for calling for drinks all round, every one choosing what he liked, the shouter paying

for all.

Connel served them himself, not a man showed about the inn except a lad called Joe. This was to prevent the bushrangers knowing how many people were there, in case they intended to rob the inn.

Connel asked them if they were going on by the coach, and the leader repeated his story of being drovers for Kallgarry, which at once confirmed his suspicions of them, for he knew the real drovers had taken the Kallgarry cattle to the Penola show the day before.

The drinks being consumed, Mr Andrews "shouted" again, but when they were brought he put his down, half finished, on the bar, and began asking for letters, and fussing about his seeds being left out in the sun, and at last went to see after them himself, but did not return. Connel served dinner himself, talking all the time

to the bushrangers, who all seemed tired and hungry, especially the boy. The coachman sat down with them, but the guard did not appear; his absence was at once commented on by the leader.

"Oh, he is making himself a basin of hot bread and milk in the kitchen," said Connel. "His teeth seem very bad, poor lad," and, turning to the coachman, asked him if his new wheels were running smooth, and told him a lot of inn gossip.

"Where is the man who was on the coach, and who is he?" interrupted the leader uneasily, as

dinner was half over.

"He is Mr Andrews of Nangwarry. I expect he is writing an answer to go by the coach to Geelong to one of the letters waiting for him there. Don't ye's mind him a bit, finish yer dinner while it's hot. He can get his warmed up, or maybe take it with the constabulary when they come."

"Constabulary! Here! When do you expect them?" eried the leader, as all the bushrangers

rose hastily from the table.

"Oh, sometime this afternoon, I believe. Mercy me, here they are! And me with their dinner not half ready. Bless me, what a clatter they are making," he added, as the sound of clattering hoofs, shouts of "Woa there," and a general din rose from the yard behind, which was not visible from the dining-room of the inn.

"Here, we must be going now," said the leader, hastily paying for their meal. "You will be glad to be rid of us, Mr Connel, and get your table

set;" and out at the front they hurried, across a field and disappeared into a wood opposite the inn.

Connel and the coachman roared and laughed, and went to the back door.

"Here, Ben, you can stop it now," Connel cried to the guard, who was chasing four loose horses about with a broom, and shouting and yelling at them.

"You're a smart lad, Ben, you got them scared stiff this time. They could not get out of the inn quick enough. I wonder what Joe will see; hope they don't see the boy in the wood though."

"I miss old Musket badly. When he got too old for the Ballarat police they let me have him to live at the inn. And he never was wrong. If he said, 'Bad white fellow about,' I knew we had better look out for trouble; but he only lived about eighteen months, coachman, and do you know he was just fifty, looked one hundred."

"Did Mr Andrews get off comfortably with his

parcels, Ben?"

"All right, Mr Connel. The men took his horse through the cowhouse, and he slipped round by the styes, mounted and was off in two minutes. His horse was fresh and knew fine he was going home."

"Here is Joe now, and he looks like having had fun. Well, Joe?"

"They was runnin' like rabbits through the wood. I am fair blown, for I followed them a mile into the scrub behind, and there I saw another of the blackguards with five horses hidden

in you very high wattles near the spring. They all mounted at once and made back again towards the road lower down."

"Don't go on to-night, coachman," said Connel. "They will kill you, man, after all the things you said about them, ye reckless chap that ye are."

"I am bound to go on, Connel, unless I got orders not to do so. It will be a fight, but Ben and I know they are there."

"Oh, joy!" eried Connel. "Here comes Mr Andrews' black boy, Willy. He will track them

grand."

"Mr Andrews he say coach no' go on, that um's orders. Willy go track bad white fellow. Which way um go?"

"Come on, Willy, I know, and I will run so far with you," and off went Joe.

When he came back he told them the bushrangers were still waiting for the coach at a very sharp turn, where the road was most unsafe, about five miles farther on. Knowing no coach was coming, Willy had slipped past them, and was now running hot foot for Penola to get the police. All the native short cuts were quite passable, and he would be there before very late.

Connel shut up the inn very early, and posted men all round with their guns, in case of attack, and just at daybreak Pierce Barton and eight of his men rode up. He sent Bolo to reconnoitre the scrub, and he returned grinning.

"See plenty bad white fellow in scrub near Nangwarry, them say they go kill Judge to-night. Willy him watch um now. I stay while Willy go

tell white fellow Andrews, bad white fellows come kill um. Judge say let um come, me very glad catch um and hang um, all but poor thin white fellow boy."

The troop moved cautiously through the scrub as far as it was safe, and then sent Bolo on to see what the bushrangers were doing.

. After a while he came running back.

"They got frightened. Poor white fellow boy been to look at Nangwarry, he tell em great big dogs and ten men with little many guns in one, watching for um. They going away to big scrub behind Penola by long round behind Nangwarry. We go quick, short way to Black Crag, catch um all there, plenty soon. Willy say too many bad white fellows about now. Me go tell white fellow Pierce to plenty kill um or they kill um's master."

Pierce and his men laughed and rode off to get early to this Black Crag, where there was a large cave much frequented by bad characters owing

to its many hiding-places and outlets.

CHAPTER IV

When he had started the bushrangers drinking, Mr Andrews had taken his parcel of seeds and Mrs Burns' one, and, mounting his horse, rode hard for home. To his great relief he met Willy, who told him all about the fight at Wattle Creek and how Pierce had taken Mrs Mackie home to live with him at Penola.

He sent Willy back to Connel's, hoping he would be in time to stop the coach going on to Geelong, which, as magistrate, Mr Andrews had power to do if necessary, and then hastened on as quickly as possible to get the station prepared for attack.

They watched all night, but nothing happened, and it was three days later when Bolo was seen running through the scrub on his way to the station.

"Well, Bolo, did you get them all?" said Mr Andrews.

"No, Judge, only got bad white fellow leader, and one big Irish white fellows kill; poor thin white young fellow him bad hurt, him beg Willy's master come see him die."

"My horse!" cried Mr Andrews, running in to the yard. "All right, McLcan, come if it makes you happier, and you, too, if you like, Mitchell, but I would be all safe with Bolo. I hope the poor boy is not very badly wounded. Bolo, is the doctor there?"

"Yes, Judge, doctor with um poor white fellow. He say no live till come. White Mary nurse say

she try very hard keep him alive if can."

The doctor was right, and the boy was dead when Mr Andrews got there; but he left a message with Pieree Barton, who had sat up all night with him, to say that he had been got into the prison office on purpose to help bushrangers to escape, and all his fine recommendations were forged. He had scared the leader away from Nangwarry with the tale of big dogs and revolvers, because Mr Andrews had protected him from the Irishmen on the coach, and he told Pierce he was very glad to die and escape from the bad life his father, who was afterwards found to be a notorious scoundrel, forced him to live. Pierce said he was a very weak-minded, sickly lad.

Mr Andrews spent the night with Pierce in his own house, to Mrs Mackie's great content, and she told him all about her husband's last hours.

CHAPTER V

With good and bad years in the station affairs eight passed without much incident. Mr Burns got rather frail, and found the long ride to Nangwarry too much for him; so Mr Andrews was often up at Yomola. Gladys and Jane grew up very pretty girls, and were both engaged. On returning home from a visit there about a year before, Mr Andrews had been met at his own gates by Billy in full uniform as a policeman.

"Are you going to make it your profession, Billy?" Mr Andrews asked, as they were at

dinner.

"Oh, no, sir. Whenever Pierce has cleared the colony of bushrangers I am going to be a fruit farmer, but for Annie's memory's sake I won't start till I can say there is not one of those ruffians left to terrorise the station. Father is going to stock a farm at Wattle Creek for me, but I don't want him to spend any money doing it till I can say the last bushranger is gone; and Sam Pringle says the same. He is longing to be back at his mine again, but he says not while one of them remains, and Pierce thinks there are five of them still. There are stories of one who is said to wear a suit of armour, off which the bullets rattle harmlessly. Pierce laughs at the idea, but I am not quite sure about it. What do you think, sir?"

"That it is possible, Billy, but I agree with

Pierce, not at all probable, my boy."

The hut that had been made for Willy's grand-parents in the scrub just outside the station was always looked upon as Willy's own property. Mr Andrews had long known that Willy had a lubra called Ya Ya, who lived with the dwindling tribe, but occasionally remained for weeks together in Willy's hut; but he usually went to see her in the part of the scrub the tribe frequented, about twenty-five miles away from Nangwarry.

A terrible epidemic broke out among the natives, both myal and half-civilised, and Willy went off to look for his relations, who had not been seen

for some time.

Mr Andrews was very anxious about him, as the illness seemed to be infectious; probably it was a very virulent influenza and malarial fever.

Willy was a long time away, and Mr Andrews, who was much attached to his faithful black, had decided to go and look for him while there was still a few more moonlight nights to come, and McLean was going with him, when he heard Willy's voice speaking to the man on night watch, and in a few minutes he came into his master's room.

"Master, eome, my brother very bad, me brought him and um lubra to hut; all um people dead but um and Lu Lu."

"I am very sorry, Willy, come and we will go and see if I can help him," and taking some remedies, he went with him to the hut where the big black lay in the last stage of the fever, and in spite of all that Mr Andrews and the Penola doctor, who was got, could do, he died some days after.

"Master, can Lu Lu live in hut with Ya Ya? She got no friends now to go to, only Willy."

"Certainly, Willy; Ya Ya and she will be

company for each other."

Mr Andrews gave the women some hens and a cow, and Willy drew their rations of flour and other things for them from the station. McLean, who had a sewing-machine, of which he was very proud, made them each a nice petticoat of some gorgeous print, and they seemed to settle down very happily together.

Having been to Geelong on business Mr Andrews decided, as he was in no hurry, to stop the night at Wattle Creek Hotel and see the Mackenzies.

He found Pierce Barton there, and, as it happened to be the full moon, he made a suggestion to him.

"Pierce, are you game to go with me to Kalangodoo, and see if that tribe of natives have suffered from the fever?"

"I would like very much to do so, Andrews. It is only four hours' walking through the serub from Wattle Creek. I was so sorry I did not know you were going when Roland was at Nangwarry. It would have saved you some very rough travelling to have approached the place from Wattle Creek, but Roland did enjoy the whole thing."

"Come along, then, and don't say a word to Mackenzie," said Mr Andrews. "Whom can we

safely tell?"

"I will tell Billy Burns. Good thing Sam Pringle is not here to make a row about our going," said Pierce.

They reached the cave where Pierce and his father had hidden, and which commanded a good view of the place, and settled down to wait.

The moon rose and got higher and higher, but no natives appeared till, just as Mr Andrews and Pierce were about to leave the eave, an old native with his lubra, and an unusually tall and finelooking young black approached; the lubra carrying part of a sheep probably stolen from Yomola.

The old man seemed very tired, but after the lubra made a big fire and they had feasted on the mutton, he got up and feebly tried to dance. The young black took no notice, but sat hunched up on the grass, the picture of misery. The lubra elapped encouragingly, but the dancer was soon exhausted, and lay down. Then the old woman began talking and telling the young black something which seemed to please him very much; the old fellow was evidently objecting and disapproving, but the lubra and young man carried the day, and picking out the best remaining bits of food, which they took with them, the three disappeared by the way Mr Andrews and Rolands had come to the place nine years before.

"That was a most pathetic sight, Pierce," said Mr Andrews, "to see the poor old creature trying to keep up his tribal customs. You and I have witnessed the last Corroboree, Barton, at Kalangodoo. I doubt they are all dead, and yet it is just nine years since I saw two hundred of them dancing here. Well, no doubt it is for the best. They are not a desirable population in the view of Australia's good, but one cannot but feel for the few remnants of a vanishing people, poor souls. When Rolands and I were here there was an unusually big sturdy child, about eight or so. That young man will be he most probably."

"I say, Andrews, do you know I have a suspicion they are bound for Nangwarry. I know a few words of their lingo, and they are, I understand, seeking for a lubra for the young fellow. The old lady kept pointing in the direction of the station, and I heard enough to make out that she was promising him he would get a lubra over

there."

"I do hope he won't go and disturb poor Willy's domestie bliss, but I could imagine that ehap would be a great beau among the ladies. Lu Lu is elderly, but Ya Ya is young still. Oh, I don't think they are going there, Pierce. Most likely they are on a begging expedition to Melbourne, but, Pierce, I do not remember that mound over there the last time."

"Neither do I, Andrews, it looks like a native graveyard. Let us go and see what it is. It is

artificial anyway, I am sure."

"So it is," said Mr Andrews, "and there is where the tribe undoubtedly are buried. They had come for a Corroboree, and the fever broke out among them, poor souls. If one had only known, perhaps some of them might have been saved. But come away, Pierce, the atmosphere here is neither healthy nor agreeable."

They returned to Wattle Creek, and next day went on to Yomola, where they found old Williams in great indignation. Some one, or something, had taken one of his sheep.

Mr and Mrs Burns were very sorry for the blacks, and said they were welcome to the sheep, and asked Pierce to try to find them and offer them a home on Yomola station.

Mr Andrews and Pierce stayed three days, then rode together as far as where the path to Nangwarry branched off the Penola road, and Pierce went on to Penola, while Mr Andrews made for home.

As he entered the yard all the men stopped whatever they were doing and came laughing to meet him, except McLean, who, when he saw Mr Andrews, hurried up looking very worried.

"Well, lads, what's the joke? What's wrong, McLean? You look troubled, my dear fellow."

"I am most awfully sorry, Andrews, but Ya Ya has run away with a big myal black. Lu Lu is gone too. Robins met the party vesterday when boundary riding, about fifteen miles away. Ya Ya had the grace to be ashamed of herself, and hid in the scrub when she saw him, but the young black fellow was a sight to see; he had on both the ladies' skirts, one round his waist, the other his neck, and was dancing, singing, and shouting with glee. What Willy will say I don't know. I hope he won't blame me."

"I did hear myal blacks had been seen about,

but it was an old fellow, with a decidedly elderly lubra, that I heard of."

"Shut up that sniggering there, you chaps;

it's no joke for Willy, poor beggar."

Mr Andrews told them all about the last Corroboree, and the great grave at Kalangodoo, and the story sobered them down a bit.

"We can do nothing till Willy is here," said

Mr Andrews; "where is he?"

"Bolo was sick, and one of the constabulary brought word last week. I sent Willy off to him at once. I heard to-day he is all right again, but Willy was tracking for him for a few days, and I think he will be home soon," said McLean.

Willy returned next day, and Mr Andrews sent

for him.

"Willy, I have some bad news for you. Ya Ya is not at the hut, nor Lu Lu either. I hear they have gone away with some strangers; perhaps they are Lu Lu's tribe; I think you told me she was not your brother's tribe."

"No, master, she just a myal black, very

stupid."

"Come down to the hut, Willy, we may find

out something there."

The hut entrance was closed up, but Willy soon opened it, and they went in. A number of short lengths of stick were arranged on the floor in a pattern. Willy looked at them, then a broad grin spread over his ugly but honest black face.

"Ya Ya say she very tired of me; me getting old and ugly; she got nice new man; go with him; she neber come back no more. Willy glad;

he very tired of Ya Ya, and Lu Lu too; they always in my way. Can go away again, master, for one, two day?"

"Ah, no, Willy, don't go, I can't do without you at Nangwarry. Stay with us, and don't go fighting that big black fellow for Ya Ya, and

perhaps getting hurt."

"What me fight him for, master? Willy shake um hand, say, thank you very much to take away Ya Ya, him plenty tired of her. Master, get um dirty hut burn; might change um mind, come back again. Me live at station now, all same as white fellows?"

"Certainly, Willy, you shall have the little room near the entrance for your own," said the Judge, struggling to maintain a proper gravity.

"Willy go tell Bolo, master, him rid of Ya Ya?"

"Very well, Willy," and Mr Andrews walked back to the station, while with songs and joyful shouts Willy ran to Penola to give his friend the news that he was rid of his encumbrances.

Greatly relieved, Mr Andrews told McLean, and when they at last were able to stop laughing, the men were ordered to burn the hut at once, as Willy no longer required it.

The presence of the women so near the station had been a source of much anxiety to Mr Andrews, but they had nowhere else to go, and had been very quiet and well behaved, but still Mr Andrews felt grateful that there was now no risk of trouble

at the shearing time next season.

Later in the afternoon, Pierce Barton came riding up with two troopers, in a great way about Willy, for word had come to Penola that myal blacks had stolen his lubra, and Pieree had hurried off, picturing to his men an injured and enraged Willy, fighting desperately with the wild man to rescue his Ya Ya, and being killed by him, and Willy, being much liked, the men could not push on fast enough to his assistance.

"Which way have they gone? Let us have fresh horses, McLean, as quick as you can; there is not a moment to lose if we are to make up with

Willy before he finds them."

"It is all right, Pieree; did you not see Willy as you came along?" replied McLean, laughing.

"No. We heard some one singing one time,

we thought."

"You did, it was Willy, hot foot for Penola to tell Bolo he was rid of Ya Ya, and chanting a joy song."

The men roared as they led off the steaming

Brunette and the troopers' horses.

Mr Andrews invited them all to stay the night, bidding the store-keeper, Mitchell, give out holiday rations, and the men spent a most hilarious evening in their quarters.

McLean had started early for Connel's.

"Well, I need not have been in such a desperate hurry," laughed Pieree, when they were at dinner, "this is a much nieer way than I expected to have spent the evening. I salute Willy as a philosopher and a wise man, Andrews."

"I am going to buy that bit of land and fourroomed hut those queer Russian people squatted on from Brown, and give it to Willy with a small stock, and see how he gets on as a landed proprietor. He is getting middle-aged, as natives go, over thirty, for Musket, who every one thought so very old, was barely fifty when he died. If anything happened to me he would then be provided for, and I am trusting to you, Pierce, to look after the poor fellow. Sometimes I wonder if I did right in taking him away from his own people as I did; he leads a rather artificial life here at Nangwarry."

"I will look after him most gladly, Andrews, if occasion did arise for me to do so, for not only is Willy an old personal friend, but if it had not been for him that day at Wattle Creek there might have been a terrible disaster; for one of those lads Mackie was training told me that when he saw the Sergeant fall, he felt quite panicky, and it was the sight of Willy coolly boomeranging the bushranger leader that kept him steady, and I have found out since that a few miles away there were six more bushrangers coming to help to raid the Maekenzies at the hotel, and the leader expected to dispose of Mackie and his lads easily, and come on here after plundering Yomola on the road; so friend Willy deserves well of the whole community, and you must not worry about him, Andrews."

"I would not so much if people would only not treat him, Pierce, but the last time we were in Melbourne some thoughtless chaps made him quite queer. However, he was well aware of it himself and told me that, 'Next time bad white fellows try to make Willy drunk, him

say no, nasty stuff, make um head ache, don't like it."

"If I catch any chaps at Penola doing so, my word, won't they get it," said Pierce. "But I know in strange places I have to be very careful about Bolo too, Andrews. You will long outlive Willy, most probably, and if not, I will look after him. How time does fly; it is eight years past since Annie died. Billy is very like her, don't you think? He is just the same brave. ready little fellow he was when he went for Crackshot with the poker. Small, slight chap as he is, there's a lot in Billy. I can see he just about hates the police work, yet for Annie's sake, he will stick it out till the colony is cleared of them. Sam Pringle's the same. Between them they look well after me. Sam saved my life twice in the Never Never Land. He wanted to marry Annie once, Billy told me."

"Yes, I know it, Pierce. Mrs Burns seems very pleased at Jane's and Gladys' engagements."

"And so is their father. Ada won't know what to do without them. Now seven in the family, Andrews."

"What, another, Pierce!" exclaimed Mr Andrews.

"Yes, a boy, last week. It is well the eldest is a girl. Little Annie, she is the image of her aunt, such a useful, motherly little soul, though only seven. The twins are great fun."

"I hope McLean will enjoy his holiday at Melbourne. He has not been away except on station business since he came back from Scotland," said Mr Andrews. "He was in a great way about Willy. I don't expect Ya Ya will ever be seen

again."

"No, they are a Never Never Land tribe, and I hear what remains of several of them are amalgamating, and going up north to get away from the white people, who they think caused the fever. But personally I think the break up of the bushrangers' laager in the Never Never Land is enabling them to go home there again. The bushrangers killed and misused them terribly, poor creatures, and I don't wonder if it gave them what Mackenzie would call a 'scunner' at the whites. I fear, Andrews, all that you, and those who are fair to the native, would do for them is ruined by 'plenty bad white fellow.'"

CHAPTER VI

A GENERAL commotion of men running, shouted orders by McLean, and the firing of two rapid shots together from the latter's gun, brought Mr Andrews out to the veranda one morning just as daylight began to creep in.

"What in the world is the matter, McLean?"
"Some one bushed in the scrub, Andrews. They
wakened me firing signals of distress. I hope they
heard me answer just now, but there seems no reply
so far. Yes, there are two shots! Try if you can
locate them with your glass. It is lighter now."

Mr Andrews fetched his telescope, and, after a long searching look at a hilly part of the scrub towards Penola, exclaimed, "Good Lord, it's a woman, McLean! She is leading a horse with a man riding, who is either very ill or hurt. He can hardly stick on. Fly, Willy! They are at the big dead gum tree. Here, take my flask," thrusting it into the black's hands. "Tell them we are coming with the buggy," and Willy tore off at full speed.

The men brought the buggy out with two strong horses in it, and Mr Andrews and McLean drove off as quickly as the very rough, uneven ground would admit, till they reached as close to the place the bushed pair had been seen as

the buggy could get.

"Cooee!" cried McLean.

"Cooee! cooee!" replied a strong, clear female

voice and that of Willy together.

McLean ran up a steep bank, and found lying on the ground, with Willy supporting him, a neighbouring station proprietor, a Mr Hammerton who lived about fifty miles away. His widowed daughter, Mrs Moss, was trying to give him some of the contents of Mr Andrews' flask, but he seemed in great pain and only half conscious

"Oh, Mr McLean, how thankful I am you heard me firing, and have come! I was in perfect despair when Willy arrived like a dear black angel to help me. Father's horse got his foot in a rabbit hole and broke his leg, and I had to shoot the poor dear pet; and father strained his back so badly I could hardly get him on to Floss. Willy eleverly eaught him as he fell off just now, too ill to stick on any longer. Do you think you could get a buggy up here, Mr McLean ? "

"No, Mrs Moss, but Mr Andrews is at the foot of this erag with it, and he will come up, and we will carry Mr Hammerton down to the buggy. Cooee, Andrews! It's Hammerton, and he is badly hurt. Mrs Moss is with him. You come up here and we will carry him down. Find a less steep way than I came if you can," shouted McLean, as Willy swung himself down from rock to rock to hold the horses.

Mr Andrews at last got an easier way down, and McLean and he with difficulty carried the stout, heavy old man down to the waiting buggy, and made him as comfortable as they could. Mrs Moss followed them with the tired mare, and when they had got her father in, thankfully sank down on the seat beside him, while Mr Andrews led the horses and McLean and Willy followed with Floss. All the way to the station they met the men riding and running to help.

"My dear Hammerton, what sort of a serape is this that you have got poor Blanche into?" said Mr Andrews; "where on earth were you

going to over in the scrub there?"

"We always seem to come to grief on the way to Nangwarry, Andrews. Do you remember when my wife broke her leg and you set it so beautifully? Try what you can do for this wretched back of mine; it is very painful. I thought I knew the way through the scrub, but missed it somehow."

"And what about the bushrangers, Hammerton? If they had known who was wandering alone in the scrub, they would soon have made Blanche and you prisoners, and held you both to ransom."

"No fear, Andrews, I have never been held

up yet. I am not one bit afraid of them."

"Well, I am, and I am also very thankful to see you safe, if not sound, at Nangwarry."

"Blanche, my dear, you look utterly worn

out."

"I am just dead tired, Mr Andrews. I do think I must have walked the whole fifty miles. Oh, daddy, dear, don't do this again, please don't, or my poor bones will be left to adorn the serub

some day. As to bushrangers, I did not dare think of them or I would have sereamed. I saw dingoes grinning at us in the dark, Mr McLean. I did indeed, dad, you need not laugh; and Floss let fly with her heels at some unseen horrors three times."

"Now we are home," said Mr Andrews. "Blanche, will you prefer to go and lie down for a while in your room, or have breakfast first?"

"Breakfast first, Mr Andrews. I am simply starving. I have nearly forgotten when we last had some food, yesterday forenoon I believe it was. That tea is heavenly. I shall have six

cups I warn you."

McLean and two of the men got Mr Hammerton at last to bed, and Mr Andrews found that the injury to his back was a very serious one, and, after doing all he could for him, sent a man on horseback to Penola for the doctor, and Willy to his station to let Mrs Hammerton know that he and their daughter were safe at Nangwarry, for he knew she often was very uneasy about her husband, for he was so reckless about his safety.

Mr Hammerton was enormously rich, and it was simply tempting Providence for him to go alone with his daughter through the scrub with bushrangers about.

They were intending to stay one night at Nangwarry on their road to Melbourne, where Mr Hammerton was building a nice house for his wife, who much preferred the town when she could get away from the station. Mrs Moss, on the contrary, hated town life, and loved the station, and had only accompanied her father, as he would ride to Nangwarry alone through the scrub, and she could not let him go by himself.

She had married her father's manager. He was also a nephew of her mother's, but prosperity did not agree with him, and she had had a most unhappy life until he was killed several years before in a drunken row, when staying with his great friends and companions, the Greens, at the New Mines.

Since her husband's death Mrs Moss had devoted herself to assisting her father in the care of the station, and thought nothing of a hard day's boundary riding. Mr Hammerton had no manager now, and Mr Andrews had been told she now really did all the superintending, as her father was getting old and too heavy for much riding, and her mother was no horsewoman.

During the eight weeks they stayed at Nangwarry Mr Andrews saw with much amusement how much Mrs Moss was attracted by McLean, and his great admiration for her, while her father constantly and openly expressed his longing to have McLean at Hammerton, as they called the station. Just before they left, after the doctor had given Mr Hammerton permission to go home by the long road, round by Penola, in the buggy, Mr Hammerton said one day:

"Andrews, I hope I am not being very inconsiderate and selfish to you, but can you let McLean

go home with us? I will be so very grateful to you if you will."

"Certainly, Hammerton, I will be delighted for him to go, and may I say I am sure Blanche wishes him to accompany you."

"That is just what I hope for, Andrews, that

Blanche and McLean will marry."

"Then, my dear Hammerton, you will have to speak very plainly to McLean. He is an excessively proud man, and you are very rich,

and Blanche is your only child."

"If MeLean marries her, Andrews, he will be a millionaire after I die. I do so hope and pray that he will; for I know this back of mine is permanently damaged, and I will never mount a horse again. If they marry, Mrs Hammerton and I will go and live in Melbourne, and they will have the station for themselves. Thank you, Andrews, you are very kind to give McLean up so uncomplainingly, for, if I have my wishes, you won't get him back ever again, at least not permanently."

"And I am delighted at McLean's good fortune. He is a fine fellow, and will make Blanche very

happy, I am sure."

The following week they went home, MeLean with them, and he did not return for two months, and then only for a few weeks to make preparations for his marriage to Blanche Moss. Mr Andrews could not help chuckling a little at the idea of the cantankerous old Scotch grandmother's chagrin, when the news would reach her of the despised McLean being now a millionaire, and as

soon as the marriage had taken place, he determined to write to an old friend who, he knew, was an acquaintance also of Mrs Grey, and get him to fully inform granny. She did not allow his youngest daughter to write to her father at all, but Ida wrote occasionally, and had lately sent him photos of his two pretty little grand-children, which had pleased him very much and delighted Blanche Moss, who declared that if Ida did not bring the children out soon to see their new granny in Australia, she would go home secretly and steal them both.

The grand house Mr Hammerton had built in Melbourne was now finished, and as soon as nearly a ship load of beautiful furniture, got out from London, arrived, the Hammertons went through by easy stages to Melbourne, and invitations to the grandest wedding the town had ever seen were sent out.

Mr Andrews accompanied McLean as his best man at the ceremony, and as early as they could get away the bride and bridegroom escaped from the uncongenial fuss to the scrub, where they camped one night on their way home, guarded by all the Hammerton station hands, who had managed to get down to Melbourne, for Blanche was very popular with the men, and soon MeLean was equally so.

To Mr Andrews McLean was an irreparable loss, and he debated in his mind which of three courses he would take: to resign the magistracy, get a new manager, or he even thought of selling the station and going home. One or other was

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inevitable. Mitchell he made first station hand, but he was not capable of being manager, nor had he any wish to try it.

Magisterial business being slack at the time, Mr Andrews determined not to take any steps at all till after shearing time, the great yearly event on the sheep stations.

CHAPTER VII

"I DON'T eare if we are short-handed, Mitchell, twelve Irish out of twenty-five men is too many already. We are shearing early this year, and don't need to rush it. I like shearing and will take a hand myself, but fourteen Irishmen! No thank you, Mitchell, not at Nangwarry while I am here. Send those two fellows on to Yomola to-morrow. Burns is very short of men, and, as he has no other Irish, two won't be able to kick up rows; besides, if they do, I'll warrant Stanley Burns will settle them. We will start to-morrow."

The shearing went on steadily. Mr Andrews worked very hard, and the heat was terrifie, but at last it was over. Mr Andrews, shearing hard all the time, took the last sheep himself.

"There, Mitchell, I have sheared my last," he said, letting the animal go, and fell to the ground.

The men at first thought he had only fainted with the heat, but soon saw it was a paralytic seizure, and a man galloped off to Penola for the doetor, another to Yomola for Mr Burns. Both came as fast as horses could bring them, but the case was too serious for an amateur, and a nurse was got as soon as possible from Melbourne hospital; it was three weeks before consciousness returned. MeLean was sent for and came at once. He stayed as long as he could, but when the weeks grew into months and no improvement in his walking powers took place, the doctors urged Mr Andrews to go home for advice in London or Edinburgh, but held out little hope of recovery.

To manage his station when unable to either walk or ride was impossible, and Mr Andrews decided to sell and go home for good; he had resigned his magistracy as soon as he was able to sign his name.

A neighbour who had a station not far off between Nangwarry and Melbourne, had asked him if he heard of a station for sale to let him know, as he wanted to buy one for his son, who was going to be married; so Mr Andrews wrote to him, but was afraid the station would be too large and expensive. Mr Andrews asked Mr Fotheringay not to mention to any one that he was selling, as he did not feel able to face the fuss people who knew him would make if they heard, and he wished it to be thought he was only going to see the doctors and take a long holiday.

A reply came back willingly agreeing to the price, and proposing that young Fotheringay should come at once, ostensibly as manager, during his absence, and take charge before Mr Andrews left.

This was a very welcome arrangement to Mr Andrews, for Mr Burns was ill, and Mrs Burns could not leave him. McLean had had to return home to Hammerton, also the nurse to her hospital. Pierce Barton was away at Bathurst attending a convention of chief constables, and Mr Andrews had only the station hands and the

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devoted Willy for companionship, and was often very weary, as books and papers were few and hard to get, and he daily saw more plainly Australia was no place for an invalid to live in permanently.

Young Fotheringay arrived and proved a most pleasant, companionable fellow. He took a great fancy to Willy, and assured Mr Andrews that he would be delighted to have him on the station, and would look after him; but the future of his faithful black weighed heavily on Mr Andrews' mind.

Lying on a couch in the veranda one day when Fotheringay and all the men were busy, and Willy had run up to Yomola to ask for Mr Burns, who was slowly recovering from his illness, very weary of himself and troubled about Willy, Mr Andrews, looking through his glass at the Penola road, saw a policeman riding alone through the scrub, and soon, to his great relief, found it was Pierce Barton.

"Well, Pierce, here you are at last. I was afraid I might have to go home without seeing you, and I have a lot I want to speak to you about, my boy."

"I am so grieved to think you were so ill, Andrews, and I never heard of it till I got to Hammerton and the McLeans told me. I do hope the doctors will put you on your feet again soon now, when you get home for awhile."

Mr Andrews shook his head. "I will never walk again, Pierce, I know that. I am supposed to be going just on a visit, but I have sold Nang-

warry to Fotheringay, who is supposed to be a new manager, and am going home for good. Australia is no country at present for a helpless man."

"We will miss you very much, Andrews, but I suppose it is inevitable. What does Willy say to it?"

"He does not know, Pieree. I do not want him to do so till he has got quite accustomed to being without me, and it is of his future I want to speak to you. You once promised me you would look after him when I was gone."

"And so I will be delighted to do, Andrews. Poor chap, he will be heart-broken at parting with you. Indeed, we all will be."

"Come and see me, Pieree, at home, will you?"

"Sam Pringle and I have long been planning a holiday together in Europe, and when we have ended this gang of bushrangers we can go. To see you will be an additional motive for our

going, Andrews."

"Delightful, Pierce! What a time we will have together in London if I am better! Sam Pringle is a first-rate fellow, and I will be looking forward greatly to your coming, both of you. But, Pierce, I am very anxious about Willy. I won't tell him that it is not just a holiday, and will say good-bye to him here at Nangwarry, not to take him to the temptations of Melbourne, as he seems always to have plenty of money. He told me he had let his house to a man, I gather to be a geologist, as Willy described his proeeedings as 'Old white fellow lodger, him knock um rocks with little hammer, put bits of stones in um bag.' I think Willy said also that you

knew the man, Pierce?"

"Yes, I had met a man answering to Willy's description of his lodger last year in Ballarat, and I went round on my way here and saw him. It was Professor Goldie, the geologist, all right. He has got three rooms for himself and his two assistants, and is most interested in his landlord. who, he said, was quite up to the proper rent to eharge, and insisted on keeping one room for himself in case he wishes to stay there. Don't worry about Willy, Andrews. He loves tracking with Bolo, and after you leave I will ask him to come and stay in the Penola barracks for awhile to help Bolo, who really has more tracking to do than he is able for, and he has not got the initiative or the dogged pluck Willy has. He will be invaluable to me, and if he cares to stay altogether so much the better. And when he wants a change there is not a station for five hundred miles round where Judge's Willy would not be a welcome guest. They want him to live at Yomola, and Wattle Creek, and Hammerton while you are away, but let me have him, please. I need him most, and we are great friends, Willy and I. I do wish you had not to go, Andrews. It will make a sad break."

"Well, if McLean had not married again I might have managed it, but Mitchell is not capable of managing, good fellow as he is, and does not want to stay. He is getting married and joining Connel in the inn, Pierce. Do you know, I think

I will start this week and get it over, now I have seen you and arranged about Willy. I feel much happier about the poor fellow now you have told me he likes the tracking with you, Pierce. Have you got all that Never Never Land gang rounded up, do you think?"

"All the really dangerous ones but five, so far as I know. I heard two of them had bolted, which, if true, leaves three only. I am going after them beyond Ballarat next week, and you might suggest to Willy the idea of joining me

there when you go."

CHAPTER VIII

THREE days after Mr Andrews started on his way to Melbourne, driving slowly all the way, as the least shaking hurt him, and Mitchell was very thankful when they arrived, so weak and exhausted he had got; but a good night's rest at the Hammerton's comfortable house quite revived him, and two days after he went early on board the ship to get comfortably settled down before she sailed. He sat watching the steward, who had been appointed his attendant, settling the large cabin he had taken for the voyage, and telling him what could go in the hold and what he wanted in the cabin.

"Put that box under the berth," said Mr Andrews.

The steward tried to do so, but there was something there already, and the man looked under.

"Come out of that, ye black image," he yelled, dragging Willy by the heels.

"Willy!" cried his master, "is that you?"

"Yes, master, Willy go home with master, he no fear of sea. Take much better care of master than that white fellow there."

"But, Willy, you could not stand the cold in England," said Mr Andrews.

"Willy got very big new coat, he get on all

right, go with master, bring him back again very soon."

"But if you die of the cold, Willy, you won't be at Nangwarry to welcome me back as we planned."

"Willy not afraid, go with master over sea,

and bring him back again plenty soon."

"It was very good of you, Willy, to come and see me off, but go with me, my poor fellow, you cannot, but I will tell you what you can do for me. I want very much to send a message to Pierce Barton, up to Ballarat, and you might take it and stay and help Bolo for awhile. It will pass the time for you, and I know he wants you very much."

Willy was silent for a few minutes, then he said, "Very well, master, if Willy no can go home with you, he go and stay with white fellow Pierce till master come home plenty soon come

back, master."

"Yes, Willy, do. I will write the note and

you go as soon as you can."

Mr Andrews told Pierce what had happened, and while he wrote the steward, who was a very good fellow, assured Willy he would take the greatest care of his master, and MeLean went on shore with him, and got provisions for the long run, and went with Willy for a mile or so out of the town, as the story had spread, and the kindhearted but foolish sailors were all wanting to treat the faithful black, as they were very sorry for him, and treating was their one idea of showing their sympathy with him.

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"Come and see us at Hammerton whenever you can, Willy," said McLean. "I expect I will get a letter in about four months from Mr Andrews, and when we know where he is, I could write him a letter from you, and you can give him all the news."

Willy grinned happily, and McLean hurried back to the ship, and had just time to tell Mr Andrews Willy was quite resigned to parting with him for a time, and himself bid his old employer a hasty farewell before the vessel sailed for home.

CHAPTER IX

PIERCE BARTON had difficulty in not showing his amusement at the scene in the cabin, but appreciated all the more poor Willy's great devotion to his master.

"Willy want stay and help Bolo; no like

Nangwarry when master away long time."

"Do, Willy, that's a good fellow. I have so much tracking I want done, and Bolo could not manage it all by himself. I say, Willy, suppose we try and catch all those bad white fellows before your master comes back again, that would be fine, wouldn't it?"

"Plenty good, if no bad white fellow left. Me often fear dem kill master before me get kill em. We go quick and find bushrangers now?"

"To-morrow, Willy. Go and get a good rest in Bolo's quarters, and we will go to the station that was held up yesterday and see the manager. Mr Dunean's badly wounded himself, and so is his wife."

"Plenty bad white fellows to shoot white Marys," said Willy. "Me kill um for it."

"Yes, Willy, they are eowardly brutes."

For several weeks the constabulary worked round the scrub between Ballarat and in towards Penola, but without any success. The bushrangers seemed to have vanished, yet two more stations were held up in the district, and Pierce was at his wits' end to find their hiding-place. At last, as they needed refitting in many ways, and Bolo and Willy badly required a rest, he decided to return to Penola for a few days.

On a very hot morning they reached a lovely bit of wooded serub about three miles from Penola, where there was the wreck of a giant gum tree. The top had been struck by lightning, but the bole of the now perfectly hollow tree remained, and could hold about fifteen people. There were seats all round inside the tree, and a table, and when the country was safer the Penola people had picnies in the tree. But of late it was not safe unless a large and well-armed party came together.

Pierce and Sam Pringle agreed that, as the heat was very great, they would dismount and rest the horses and have a meal of their remaining provisions and a cup of tea; there were both grass and water for the horses.

The men were picketing their horses, and Pierce and Sam walked slowly up to the tree talking to Willy and Bolo, who had just come up, and were reporting some suspicious signs they had seen. Suddenly a volley of shots were poured on them out of loopholes in the tree. Pierce, Sam, and Willy fell at once; Bolo, badly wounded, crawled into cover. The men rushed forward and a furious battle began for some minutes;

then the dry old tree took fire and the bushrangers were driven out. Two were shot down at once, but the leader was cased in armour from head to foot, made of old stove pipes and roofing, and the police bullets rattled harmlessly on him, till at last a lucky hit in the head killed him.

Billy Burns ran to see to their own hurt; but Pierce Barton, Sam Pringle, and Willy were all dead, and Bolo evidently mortally wounded. Two policemen were wounded, but after being dressed could ride their horses. Billy's horse had been shot under him, so he mounted the distressed Brunette, who was piteously nosing at her dead master, trying to attract his attention. Bolo was lifted up in front of him, and he rode off toward Penola to take him to Mrs Mackie's care. A man riding past had seen the attack, and soon all Penola, armed to the teeth, came galloping to the constabulary's help.

Billy Burns got some one to go back and break the news a little to old Mrs Mackie, who came running out to meet them. Bolo was carried in and laid on Pierce's own bed, and the doctor did all he could for him, and thought he might live for a day or two.

"Try and get better, Bolo. Cheer up," he said, as he hurried off to see to the two other wounded men.

Bolo shook his head sadly, but decidedly "White fellow Mackie dead, white fellow Pierce dead, white Mary Annie dead, black fellow Willy

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dead. All dead. Bolo die too," and about half an hour after he did so.

They laid Pierce beside Annie, Sam Pringle near by, and in a quiet corner not far off, with the full consent of the whole little township, the two faithful blacks were buried together.

CHAPTER X

THE last of the Never Never Land gang of bushrangers were now finally disposed of, but at a heavy cost in the lives of Chief Constable Barton, Sergeant Pringle, and Judge's Willy (as every one called him), as well as the tracker Bolo. And it was with an irreparable feeling of personal loss that Billy Burns claimed and received his discharge from the constabulary, as well as a sense of uncongenial duty well done. Then he packed up all of "Annie's things" that Mrs Mackie desired to keep, to be sent for when the Yomola waggon could be spared to fetch them, hired a buggy and lad to drive her, getting two old comrades of the constabulary to accompany them for Mrs Mackie's protection, and mounting the ageing, pining Brunette, Billy Burns took his "two dear old ladies," as he called them, home to Yomola to his mother. They were both warmly welcomed by Mr and Mrs Burns, and by Ada and Stanley. Mrs Mackie at once settled down happily to help Ada with her tribe of seven, the eldest a delicate little girl, another Annie. To them her knowledge of nursing was invaluable, while her cheery ways and great experience of life were a help and comfort to all at Yomola, and Auntie Mattic was soon the children's unfailing consoler in all their small troubles. At

first it was feared Brunette would pine away, but the care and affection of the children gradually cheered the old horse up, and she had a most luxurious life, on the very best the station could provide, no other duty being required of her than to draw the light Vietoria Mr Burns had bought for his wife, when the fine new Geelong road was made soon after old Slowcoach died.

Very early in the morning, every few weeks, Brunette would be harnessed to the Victoria, Mrs Burns would drive Mrs Mackie and herself, accompanied by Mr Burns on his old roan, generally Sam Maekenzie, in order to visit his parents, and any one else who wished to visit Wattle Creek, and they would drive over to the hotel, where the horses would be stabled, and the three old ladies settle down for a happy day together. The last letters from Jane and Gladys, now both happily married, one at Adelaide, the other in far Tasmania, would be discussed, or Billy's approaching marriage to Nettie Day of Boboberry station; and the progress of his house, now nearly built; hotel and station news exchanged, or oecasionally a cheery letter from their old friend, Mr Andrews, now a helpless invalid at home in the south of England, would be read, and sometimes, a little sadly, the graves at Penola having been recently visited by one or other, past sorrows would be recalled. Mrs Maekie would pay her visit to her husband's grave and put the wreath of flowers from the Yomola garden which she always brought. Mr Burns and Mackenzie, when hotel affairs had been settled, would drive one of the many buggies belonging to it down to the little creek, where Billy would be found with his men, planting or pruning, or overseeing his nearly finished house, where in a few weeks he hoped to settle Mrs Billy Burns happily down. Billy would accompany his father back to the hotel to tea, and when the heat was over, Brunette would be again harnessed, Mrs Burns and Mrs Mackie get in to the Victoria, Mr Burns helped on to the roan, and they would start for home, Brunette stepping daintily along at her own pace, and slowly up the rise till the station came in sight; then with a joyful whinny she would start off at a round trot to the gates, where she knew the children were waiting with hands full of sugar for her and the roan.

Stanley would help his old father to dismount and then lead Brunette to her stable himself, seeing that all her wants were attended to before joining the supper party with the merry children, some of whom may now be the elderly parents and grandparents of the advancing Young Australia of the present day, that little reck, as they travel in their trains, motor ears and aeroplanes, of the hardships and isolation of their forbears, when horses were the only means of getting about, and the dangers of myal blacks and bushrangers were an ever present fear, and often caused death and loss in the old time Australian life.





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